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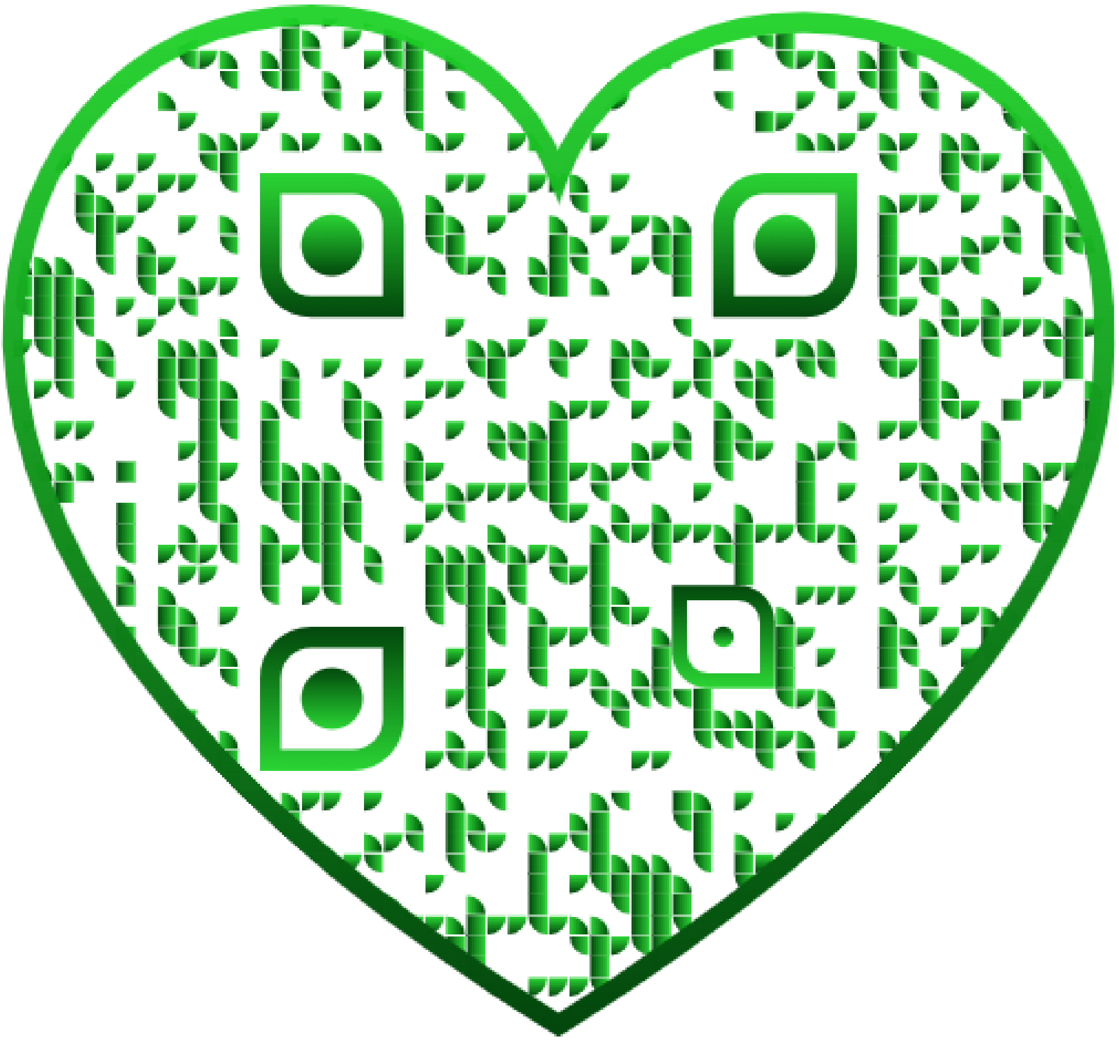

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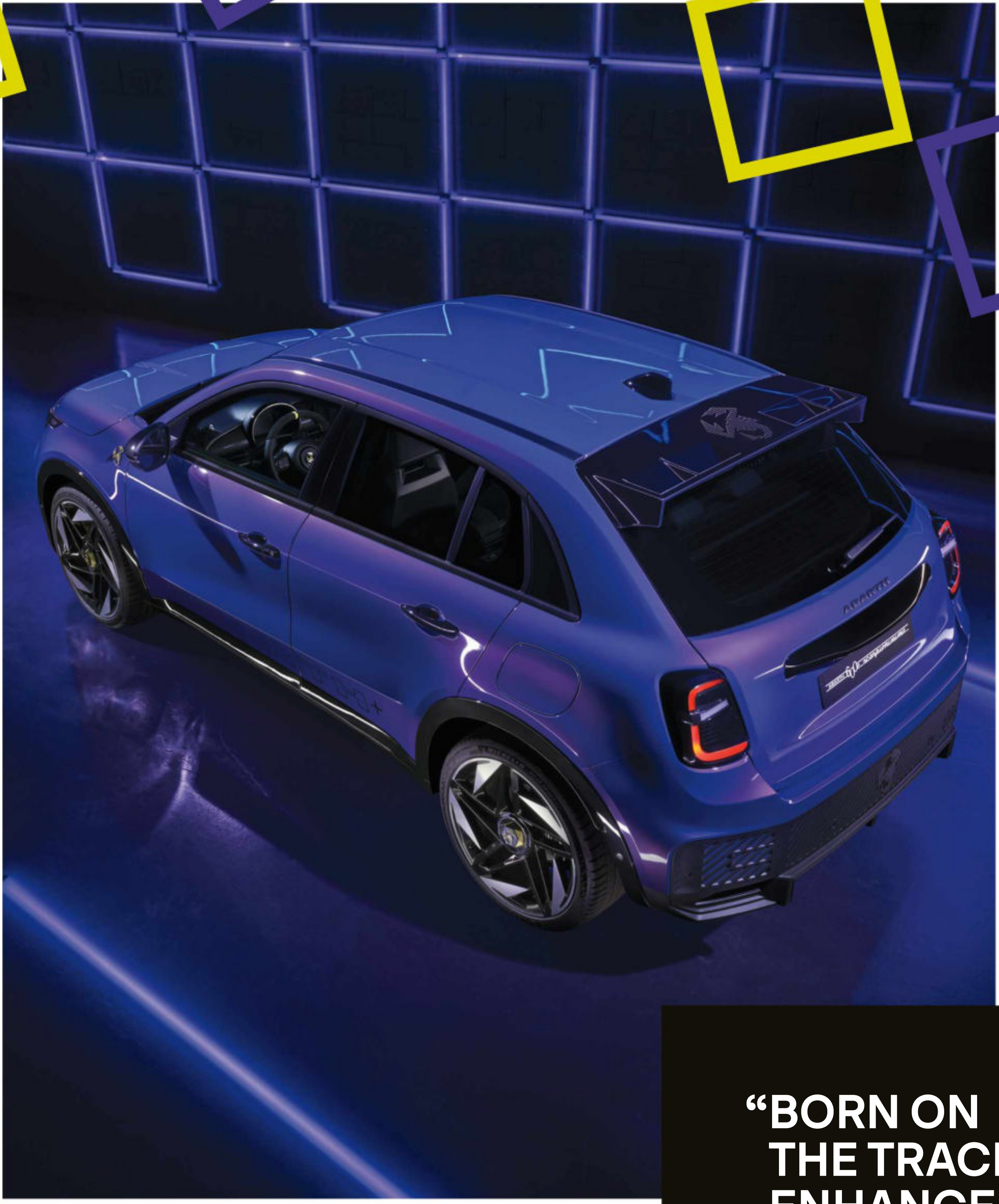
# THE MOST *POWERFUL* ABARTH **EVER**

The all-new **Abarth 600e Scorpionissima** is about to make 1,949 drivers seriously happy



“BORN ON THE TRACK, ENHANCED FOR THE ROAD”

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# Limited edition, unlimited fun

This limited-edition, piping hot hatch has been honed on the track to bring a devilish dose of Italian exuberance to the road

One of the most intriguing questions of the electric era has been how heritage marques famed for their racy ICE creations will adapt and channel their ingenuity for a more sustainable future. And it's fair to say, Abarth has answered pretty convincingly.

For 76 years now, it's been dreaming up some of the most bonkers, beastly and beautiful machines that circuits and streets alike have ever seen, starting with the original hill climb legend, the Cisitalia 204A. But this year's release of the 600e reaffirmed everyone's hopes – that Abarth can conceive EVs perfectly in-tune with modern life's rhythms, without losing any of its penchant for the feral.

Indeed, they don't come much wilder than the rambunctiously named all-new 600e Scorpionissima edition. Like many of the world's most fearsome predators, it's a rare species, with just 1,949 models rolling off the production line in tribute to the manufacturer's founding year. But if you're ever fortunate enough to find yourself behind the wheel of one, there's a hell of a lot to look forward to.

## BORN ON THE TRACK

The Abarth 600e Scorpionissima is the result of a collaboration with Stellantis Motorsport and was developed and tested on the Formula E test bench, including in a real track simulator. Happily, the lessons gleaned from this zenith of all-electric motorsport translate into meticulously thought-out components and features for the everyday motorist.

There's increased suspension stiffness for suitably responsive handling, offset by adapted hydraulic bump-stop shock absorbers, and the chassis is reinforced with a rear anti-roll bar to enhance the overall rear anti-roll stiffness. The JTEKT limited slip diff and Michelin tyres offer improved traction and grip, and in the case of the latter, some welcome noise insulation.

The Scorpionissima needs all the handling help it can get to match the mammoth 207kW 280bhp powertrain it's packing. That amounts to a maximum speed of 124mph in Scorpion Track mode, and even Scorpion Street mode will provide you with an ample 228bhp and 93mph top end. Whatever your mode, the state-of-the-art brakes and callipers by Alcon will be more than up to the task, thanks to their exemplary heat dissipation and fading resistance.

## ENHANCED FOR THE ROAD

The Scorpionissima's exterior design radiates purposeful aggression. At the front, for instance, the silhouette has been stretched to highlight the shark nose. Meanwhile, the strongly squared shapes of the aero spoiler and the extractor in the bumper have been studied and tested in a wind tunnel to optimise aerodynamic performance.

It boasts 20-inch diamond alloys with five spokes to expose the scorpion insignia on the brake callipers, and there's a choice of two striking bodywork colourways – Hypnotic Purple or Acid Green – too, so the Scorpionissima will have absolutely no trouble standing out.

There are other touches that'll help you channel a racing driver simply by being at the wheel. Take the Sabelt Alcantara seats and sports steering wheel, which combined with four different high-density foams to support each area of the body, makes you feel truly at one with the machine.

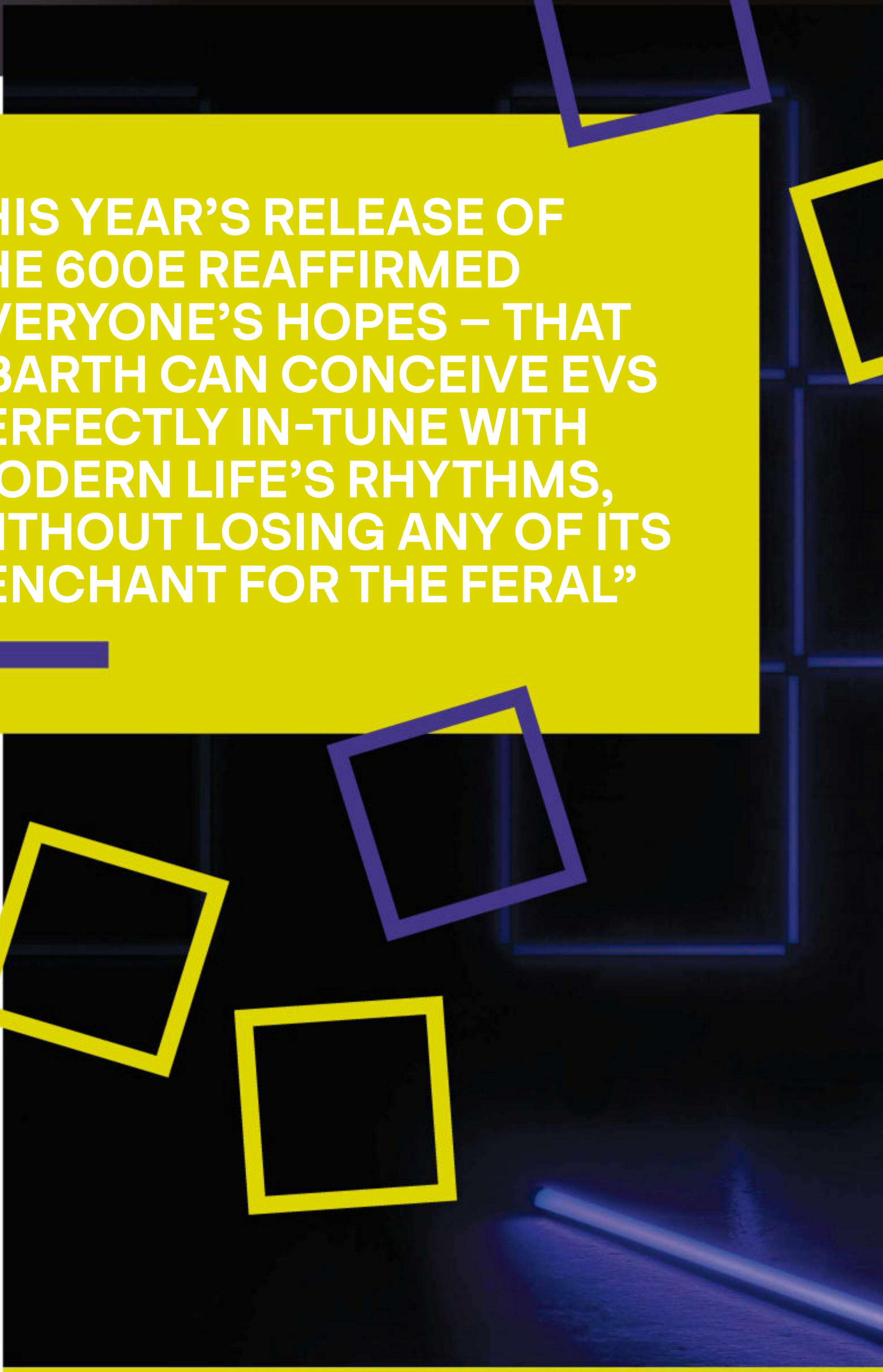
## SMILING ON THE INSIDE

All-electric high performance has never been so attainable, but if you're hankering for the guttural growl of an engine in full flow, you can switch on the sound generator using the infotainment system. It's not just an afterthought to indulge your inner child, it responds proportionately to your throttle inputs, and the exhaust note has been enriched with a deeper sound while revving.

The infotainment system also allows you to examine dedicated performance pages, such as the real-time torque management setting, which can adapt the acceleration according to weather and terrain conditions. The race gauges page will even provide you a timer and a G-diagram.

Unsurprisingly, these are just a few of the myriad features geared towards maximum ease and enjoyment. You'll enjoy adaptive cruise control and an electric parking brake as standard. In addition, the Scorpionissima comes with Level 2 Assisted Driving, including benefits like Lane Positioning and Traffic Jam Assist, as well as 360° sensors that combine with a rearview camera to make parking simple. Meanwhile, an Urban Blind Spot Monitor, power-folding mirrors, traffic sign recognition and Automatic High Beam go further yet to minimise those daily stresses on the road.

> "THIS YEAR'S RELEASE OF THE 600E REAFFIRMED EVERYONE'S HOPES – THAT ABARTH CAN CONCEIVE EVS PERFECTLY IN-TUNE WITH MODERN LIFE'S RHYTHMS, WITHOUT LOSING ANY OF ITS PENCHANT FOR THE FERAL"



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ABARTH 600e scorpionissima

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# THE NUMBERS THAT *MATTER*

## POWERTRAIN

**5.85** secs
0-62mph

**254** lb
ft of torque

**207** miles*
range (up to)

## CHARGING

**54** kWh
Battery capacity

**27** min
20-80%

**5** h **45** min
0-100%

* Model shown Abarth 600e Scorpionissima. Fuel economy and CO2 results for the Abarth 600e Scorpionissima 207kW (280PS). Mpg (l/100km): N/A. CO2 emissions: 0g/km. Electric range up to 207 miles (WLTP).

The range and electric consumption figures mentioned comply with the WLTP test procedure, on the basis of which new vehicles are type approved from 1 September 2018. They may vary depending on actual conditions of use and on different factors, such as: vehicle load, accessories fitted (post-registration), speed, thermal comfort on board the vehicle, driving style and outside temperature. The charging time depends in particular on the power of the charger on board. Visit your local Abarth Retailer for further information.

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ABARTH

## JACK RIX

**Editor-in-chief**

@jack_rix
@rixjack
jack.rix@bbctopgearmagazine.com

BBC TG
Issue 397

The world of cars and consumer tech have been hurtling towards a collision point for years... this month we have impact. Where were you when *TopGear* got the exclusive on the launch of Apple CarPlay Ultra? Yes, it's car related and we tested the new system in a suitably fruity 700bhp Aston Martin, but in essence it's a first drive... of some software. As *TG* contributor and YouTube tech king Marques Brownlee commented on our video with flat disbelief, "Tech videos on *TopGear*."

The tech takeover of cars has been creeping up on us for a while and only highlighted by the massive influx of new Chinese cars in the UK – every single one of which we drive and rate on page 72. For now, these are cars that by and large put the emphasis on battery chemistry, screen size and connectivity ahead of emotive design or handling chops. As Ollie Marriage so eloquently puts it in his review of the MG Cyberster, it has "the damping sophistication of a waterbed tumbling down a spiral staircase".

And don't expect that to change any time soon when steering feel, ride quality and cornering ability are so low on the agenda. Omoda Jaecoo UK chief, Gary Tan, talking at the *FT*'s Future of the Car summit, reckons smart tech makes cars premium now, not engine performance. "Young drivers want their cars to be as smart as their phones." So software is the new battleground, which is where Tesla stole such a march on its rivals, and why VW is pumping $5.8bn into Rivian to jointly develop "next generation electrical architecture and best in class software technology".

For me, good in-car software means convenience. I use Apple kit (phone, laptop, watch, earbuds) because they all talk to each other magically without me really understanding how or why. They just work. This new CarPlay system turns your car into an extension of that ecosystem and your phone, and therefore – sad as it may sound – your life.

But properly developed, intuitive tech is no excuse for shonky dynamics. Until autonomy takes over and we're ruled by an army of Elon's Optimus robots, cars still need to be driven by humans, and that's a valuable and joyful interaction car manufacturers have spent over a hundred years perfecting. Let's move forward but take the best bits from the past with us.

Enjoy the issue,

# CONTRIBUTORS

**WHO:** *VIJAY PATTNI*

The editor of topgear.com is a big fan of golden retrievers... and also the Nissan GT-R. Read his farewell to an icon on p98

**WHO:** *TOM FORD*

Always up for a challenge is Tom. And we don't mean juggling, we mean an in-depth van review... um, *TopGear* style. See p56

**WHO:** *JONNY FLEETWOOD*

We corralled all the Chinese cars on sale in the UK for one massive photoshoot (p72). Jonny Fleetwood did the honours

# JACK RIX
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**DEPUTY EDITOR** Ollie Kew
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**DIGITAL CONTENT PRODUCER** Ben Pulman

## ART TEAM

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**ART EDITOR** Elliott Webb

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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## CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Lee Brimble, Mark Fagelson, Jonny Fleetwood, Wilson Hennessy, Rowan Horncastle, Olgun Kordal, Jamie Lipman, Dennis Noten, Richard Pardon, Mark Riccioni, Philipp Rupprecht, John Wycherley

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TURN TO PAGE 036

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038

**ALFA SPECIAL**
First we appreciate the glory of the Alfa 33 Stradale, then all the hits (and misses) from Italy's most Italian car company

# JULY

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**ASTON vs FERRARI**

**NISSAN GT-R**
Lando Norris and his new Liberty Walk GT-R in downtown Tokyo

**THE *TG* VAN PRIX**

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# TRENDING

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

# Wild wild west (London)

Would you buy a used car from this man? Meet Britain's youngest and most eccentric classic car merchant

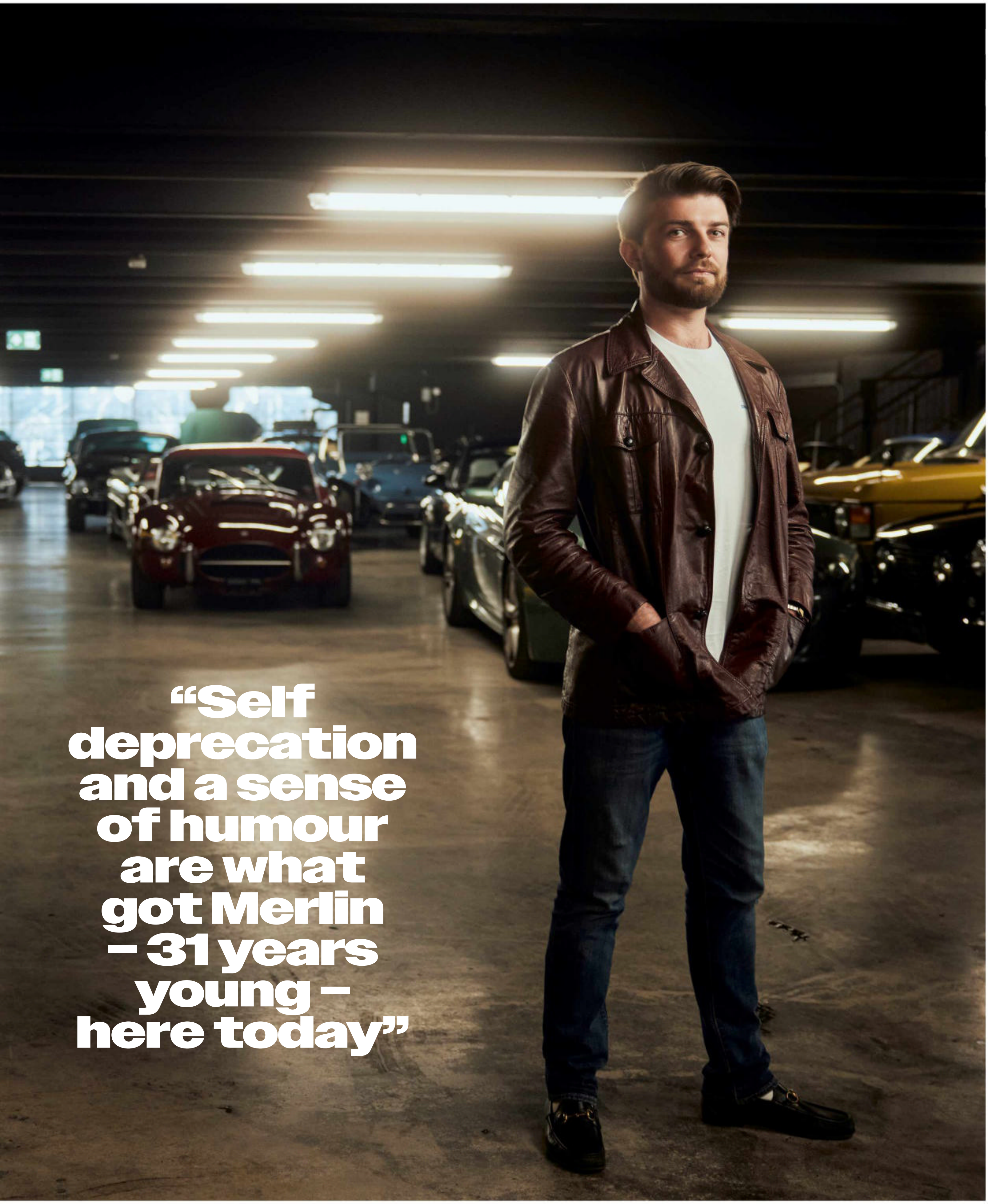
**WORDS** OLLIE KEW
**PHOTOS** TOM BARNES

Actually, Merlin McCormack does not identify as a 'car dealer'. Reclining in his tumbledown office, I ask how he prefers to be branded. "We like to wind people up. We decorated our f**king showroom like Terry Tibbs' [*the used car salesman from* Fonejacker] because the thing is a complete farce. I dunno what I am. Guess I'm an idiot who likes cars."

Self deprecation and a sense of humour (along with a bottomless well of car knowledge inherited from his restoration mad dad) are part of what's got Merlin, only 31 years young, here today. Lord of all he surveys here in his showroom – a 'need to know' location stuffed with 1960s Americana, late 1990s Ferraris, myriad Porsches and smatterings of esoteric Alfas, Fiats and Astons.

We're somewhere in west London. His tinsel flecked headquarters hide in plain sight – even armed with directions I drive clean past and back up in bafflement asking for directions. Not one of the native Londoners nor hurried travellers off to nearby Heathrow have a clue they're mooching mere metres away from literal millions worth in modern classics.

Anyway, he's no lord. He's the Duke, of London. Another joke that got out of hand and became the name of his brainchild. "'Duke of London' was a title offered to Churchill after World War Two," Merlin explains. "Because he was humble and I guess haunted by war, he politely declined it. But I was arrogant enough to anoint myself as Duke of London." He laughs and musters a straight face.



“Self deprecation and a sense of humour are what got Merlin – 31 years young – here today”

“On a separate floor in Merlin’s bunker, there’s a mouthwatering storage facility”

UNSUNG HEROES WITH UNHEALTHY OBSESSIONS

WHEEL NUT

When you’ve got the Dakar Rally at 5pm…

… and *Strictly Come Dancing* at 6pm

"Truthfully when Instagram started up, we were just trying to find a catchy handle. When it came to actually formalising it as a business, we were like 'What should we call it?' And I thought – sort of joking – 'You may know me as the Duke of London'."

Merlin's story has that rogue done well sheen that would make a quality Guy Ritchie caper. He openly admits to being lazy at school, far more interested in wheeler dealing than studies. "Guess the first thing I sold was, erm, *tobacco*, but then I got into cars. Bought my first one before I could drive." How old? "Eleven. A Peugeot 205 with a dodgy steering rack. I paid £32 and a penny. The guy was fuming. My mum had to go pick it up for me."

He acknowledges he'd have got nowhere without the enthusiastic support of his parents, especially when too young to actually drive his stock. "As soon as I looked old enough to ride a moped we started buying those. Vespas mainly. Didn't have to rely on mum, so our driveway was soon full of them. Then I went back to selling cars as soon as I was able to drive."

These days the grindset manosphere pressurises boys to be hustlers, to make their first million before they're out of nappies. So did Merlin's mates admire his entrepreneurial adolescence? "They thought it was weird. And they still do to be fair. But we were the weird kids at school anyway... we made a little bit of money but then we'd reinvest it and lose it or waste it – it wasn't until the market started picking up around 2012 we saw an opportunity, and that's become Duke of London."

It's now much more than a purveyor of modern classic cars. On a separate floor in Merlin's bunker, we find a mouthwatering storage facility, stuffed with mothballed examples of the very latest supercars in warm, secure suspended animation, waiting for their owners to jet in and select a unicorn for a Mayfair weekend.

There's redevelopment afoot in the building – more car storage. Another local facility will spawn a car meet up venue, cafe and restaurant. It's driven on by tens of thousands of @dukeoflondon social media fans who appreciate the relaxed, impish tone of the whole outfit. I ask Merlin if the old guard have had their noses put out of joint by this upstart making it up as he goes along.

"People are generally nice... but I've always been an antagonist and I hope I never lose that." He picks a millennial example. "When we first started out no one was using Instagram. Now these big dealers have got teams running their platforms. I used to go to a Christmas lunch for car dealers, and remember being sat there with them mocking me for putting cars on Instagram. 'You can't sell cars on there...'" he trails off, his point already made.

Beware: top secret showroom patrolled by savage guard dog

DUKE'S
QUALITY
MOTORS

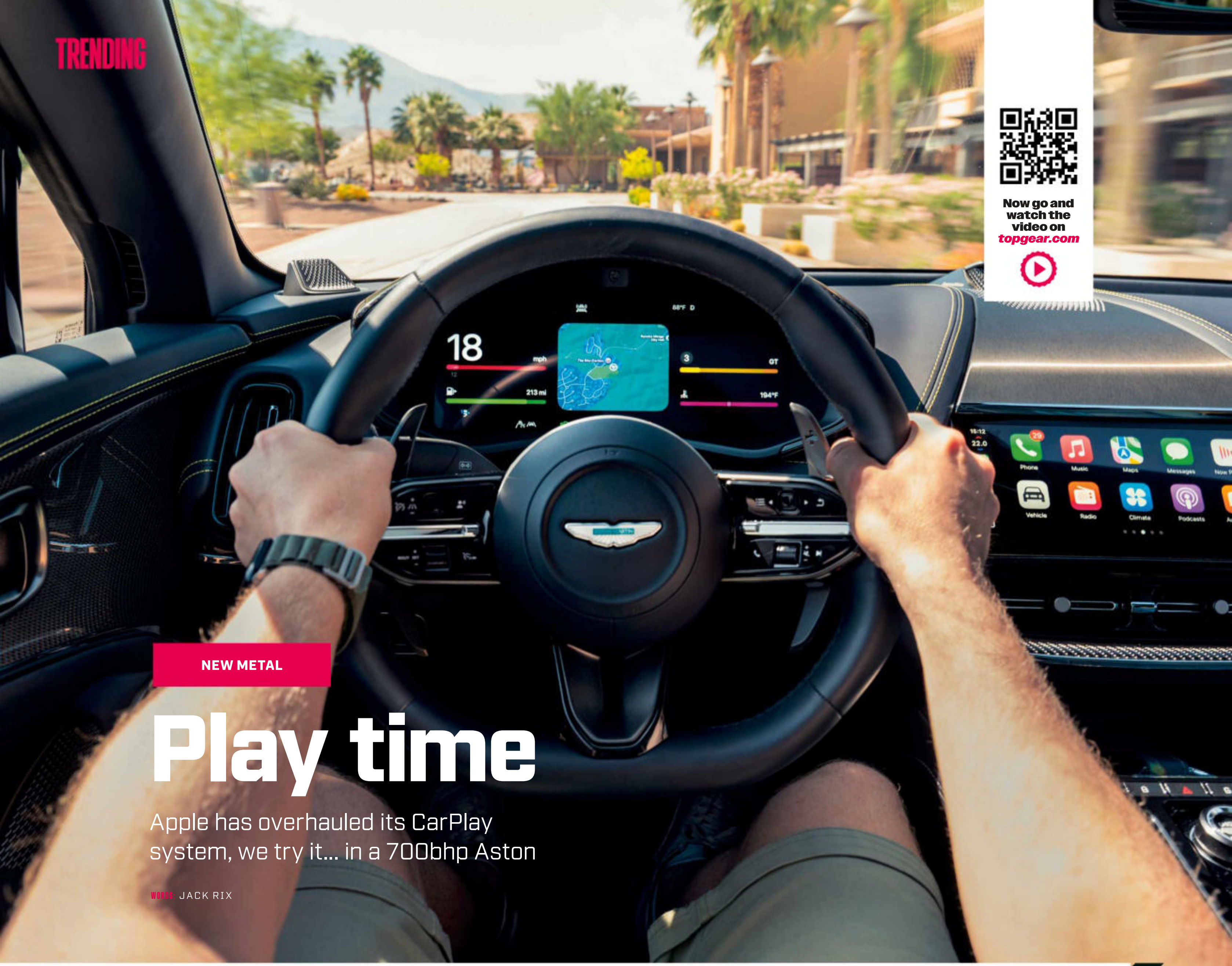
It's like a cross between Goodwood Revival and the school talent show

It's a fabulous late spring evening, so we head to the roof where Duke of London photographs the merchandise. Merlin's arranged some of his current collection – a fastback Stang, a Bentley Azure with top permanently dropped and his Ferrari Testarossa, recently clipped on a kerb outside his own showroom. It's eclectic, imperfect, and each machine tells a story.

The man himself reappears in one of his trademark outfits. The cowboy look, like Duke of London itself, is brash, unapologetic and doesn't take itself desperately seriously.

I ask if that exuberance ever hurts trade. "I think with age it's become less frequent," Merlin replies. "When I was 20 or 21 people turning up to buy their first Ferrari off me would presume 'oh, it's your dad's business'.

"We get less of that now. People realise we're knowledgeable and passionate. But I'm probably looking older anyway. Ten years in the trade would do that to you."



Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

NEW METAL

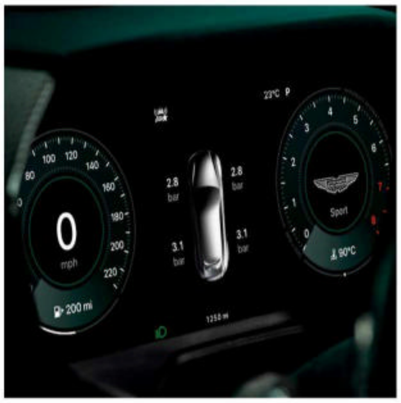
# Play time

## Apple has overhauled its CarPlay system, we try it... in a 700bhp Aston

WORDS: JACK RIX

**IF YOU OWN AN iPHONE AND DON'T** drive a car inherited from your grandma, chances are you'll know all about Apple CarPlay, the now ubiquitous software that lets you mirror your smartphone on your car's infotainment screen for a familiar looking and easy to use way of accessing navigation apps, podcasts, music, messages and more. Well, that's now officially old tech because the next gen CarPlay – CarPlay Ultra – has launched, and we've had a play.

Whereas the old system was a mirror of your phone and selected apps, all the computing was done on the phone and the car displayed that info like a monitor. Here there's a fair bit more going on.



There's still some stuff that's mirrored and computed on the phone, but that's now mixed in with what Apple calls "local UI" – info taken directly from the car, like fuel level, speed or climate controls and shown through Apple's interface. The aim is for a more seamless experience, so you're not constantly flicking between the Apple CarPlay user interface and the car's built-in system, everything is brought together in one cohesive skin. We tried it on an Aston Martin DBX707 because Aston has elbowed its way to the front to be the first carmaker offering the tech – many others will follow soon.

The main point of differentiation is it takes over your instrument cluster as well as the central screen, with a variety of dials and layouts jointly developed between Apple and Aston. Essentially Apple provides Aston with a toolbox of graphics and applications, then it fully customises them to fit and suit the car.

You can swipe between different layouts for the dials, mess with the colours of your instrument cluster and change climate control settings, heat your seat, change the radio station... all without leaving the CarPlay system. It boots up instantly too, meaning this effectively becomes your car's default software. Not content with owning your wrist, desktop, ears and eyeballs, Apple is about to take over your car too...

# HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team have it out

**JACK RIX**

**TG'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF IS A PROUD APPLE AFICIONADO**

*If you're already hooked on Apple, and a user of CarPlay, you're going to love this even more. Everything is integrated and shot through with Apple's hallmark clarity and familiarity – something that carmakers are so hit and miss with when it comes to their in-house software. By the way, you can always switch back to the manufacturer's UI if you prefer, or MkI CarPlay if you must. I'm pumped to see how other manufacturers, especially those with multiple screens measured in acres, interpret this new found freedom. At last, the Apple Car has arrived! Sort of...*

> **"At last, the Apple Car has arrived! Sort of..."**

**OLLIE KEW**

**TG'S DEPUTY EDITOR IS FED UP OF SCREENS DOMINATING OUR CARS**

*First, they came for our lovely, uncomplicated physical dials, with their characterful clock faces and subtle illumination that didn't erase every trace of serotonin. Now we can't even have a bespoke digital experience, because all Apple's interior invasion will promote is carmakers getting even lazier with infotainment. Why flush away trillions on a brand specific skin for each readout when half the global smartphone population is going to default to a rounded corners playschool interface? I'm not an Android user, by the way. I just miss a time when car interiors felt special.*

> **"Now we can't have a bespoke digital experience"**

9:41
Driver
More Settings
A/C
SYNC
72
72
73
73

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# Kids review kits

**This month, Jacob, 10, builds the LEGO® Speed Champions Ferrari SF-24 F1® Race Car**

I'm a *REALLY* big fan of Formula One, so building this set was really fun! Most of it was easy to put together, although some parts were a little challenging.

The rear wing was quite fiddly, so I got my dad to help. He also made sure the stickers were nice and straight. But my favourite part was creating the front wing and putting on the wheels and tyres.

I would definitely recommend this set to my friends – it looks very cool. I'm going to put it on display on my shelf with some of my other LEGO builds. I'd love to add more LEGO Speed Champions cars to my collection in the future, too.

**TO GET YOUR HANDS ON THIS AND OTHER FUN LEGO SETS, VISIT LEGO.COM NOW**

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# COMMENTS

## YUGO

## THE GOOD

***Good looking little thing. I like***

**Vanspock**

Ladies and gentlemen the new MkI Golf is born

**Jan Kasík**

**YES BABY!**

**Hazy leftie**

Given the amount of other manufacturers vacating the mini/supermini sector, I think this is a brilliant move

**Unicyclistperiscopes**

***PETROL? MANUAL? LOOKS LIKE THAT? SIGN ME UP!***

**Mike Wolfgang**

## THE BAD

*Hopefully it will still have the rear window defogger standard, to keep your hands warm while you push*

**Sandy McLendon**

**Will it shake itself apart at 65mph after it takes 15 minutes to get there?**

**Jeff Sheets**

**OLD YUGO LOOKED MUCH BETTER... THIS ONE LOOKS BLOATED AND OVERLY AGGRESSIVE**

**Mladen Krsmanovic**

***Do you know why it was called YUGO? It's short for: "YoU GO, but the car doesn't"***

**Zlatko Stojkovski**

If it doesn't break down every other week I don't want it

**Denis Magdalenich**

## THE UGLY

"LOOKS SUPER COOL"?? A PORSCHE OR A DODGE CHALLENGER LOOKS COOL. THIS IS JUST ANOTHER CLONE PEOPLE'S CAR

**Archie Marshall**

**SOMEONE CLEARED OUT A BOTTLE OF RAKIJA TO THINK THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA**

**Steven Pamlényi**

***Definition of insanity if investing... "They that forget history are doomed to repeat it"***

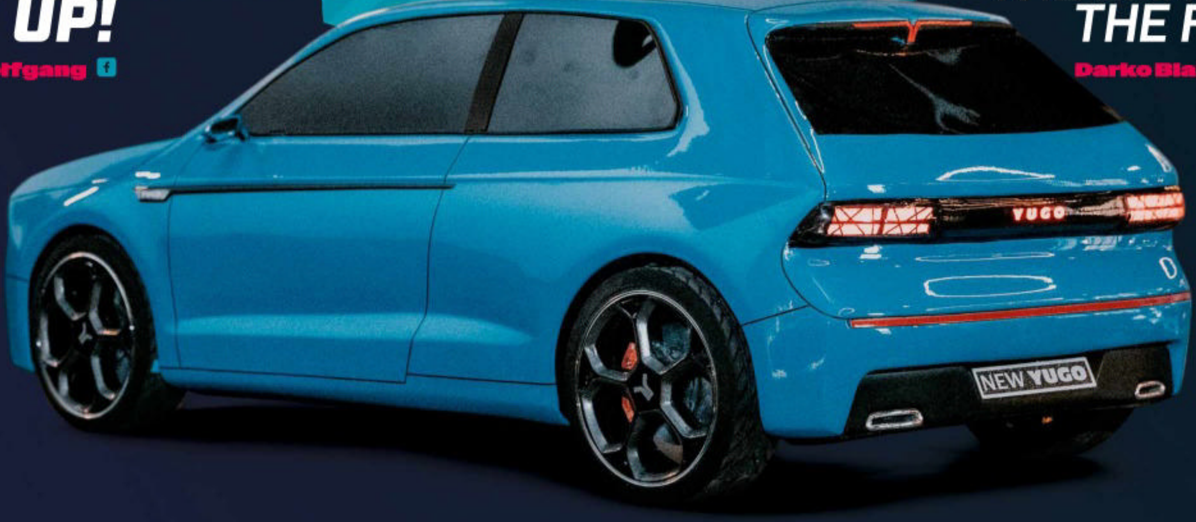
**David Shuey**

*Yugo up the hill slow, and Yugo down the hill fast, and Yugo to the junkyard because it won't last*

**Charles Ferguson**

*BEING BETTER THAN THE ORIGINAL IS NOT A LOW BAR, THE BAR IS ON THE FLOOR*

**Darko Blažok-Broz**



**THEY WILL BE PARTYING ON THE STREETS OF KRAGUJEVAC** tonight, because the Yugo is back. Yep, entrepreneur, engineer, automotive exec and university professor Dr Aleksandar Bjelić has acquired the naming rights to Zastava's communist cult hero, and he's teamed up with Serbian designer Darko Marčeta to produce this 1:5 scale model that previews a future production car.

Looks super cool, doesn't it? And don't worry, because the Yugo isn't about to become yet another identikit crossover. The newly formed Yugo Automobile showed off its model at the Car Design Event 2025 and said that the production car would be a B segment hatchback, so it'll rival things like the Toyota Yaris, Renault Clio and Volkswagen Polo.

It gets better too. The new Yugo will apparently launch with combustion engines and a choice of either manual or automatic gearboxes. A small, affordable manual hatchback in this day and age? Hurrah! **GREG POTTS**

# NEXT BIG THING

## STEER BY WIRE

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

**AT MOTORWAY SPEED YOU WANT 'SLOW'** steering, so that a tiny movement doesn't have the car darting out of lane. But if you're parking or rounding a hairpin, you want 'quick' – lots of front wheel angle without having to cross arms or shuffle hands. Steer by wire allows that, and much else too.

It gets rid of the column, so there's no mechanical link between your hands and the road. Instead, your hands make a request. A processor uses that as just one of its inputs. Other inputs are speed, the sensors for lane keeping, and the state of grip and demands of the ESP. Maybe also if you're in a sport mode or something more relaxed. The processor comes up with an 'ideal' angle of turning for the tyres, and signals to a motor on the rack to deliver it. The system can even dial in hazard avoidance and skid correction.

Now this isn't new. It was introduced a few times over the years, first by Infiniti in the 2013 Q50, but then abandoned. Merc and Saab had test cars where you steered by joystick. Now ZF is supplying its system to Nio's ET9. Toyota/Lexus is starting this year with a setup that has a yoke not a wheel. Tesla's Model S has a yoke but not SbW, but the Cybertruck has the full by wire ticket.

Given Tesla is leaning into autonomous cars and cabs, you can see why it has a by wire design in production now, because in cars where there are no hands on the wheel – or no wheel at all – then steer by wire will be non-negotiable. Nissan is actually using the Infiniti system in its test autonomous Leafs. Absence of the column also improves packaging around the driver's footwell and bulkhead, so the powertrain doesn't have to work around it. Plus, it's easier to transition a design between LHD and RHD.

If you're worried about failure, note pretty much everything upstream from the rack is doubled: motors, wires, controllers. Manufacturers have had years to make this stuff reliable, as almost all 4WS systems are by wire at the rear. But then, if they go wrong the rear wheels just point straight and the fronts carry on as normal.

Aside from reliability, the other *really* tricky bit is making this seem enjoyable and natural. There's force feedback to the steering wheel via a motor up there, aiming to replicate tyre feel. When the rack motor is working hard, the steering wheel motor torques back against your hands.

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE...

## MAZZANTI EVANTRA

**What is it?**

*A startup supercar by numbers: exotic Italian name, spaceframe steel chassis, with a hefty Chevy LS7 engine dropped in the middle and tuned to beyond 700bhp.*

**Did they actually build any?**

*At least a couple of working prototypes exist, drive, and have taken part in Italian supercar meetups and driving events. But even with modest targets of building just five cars per year, evidence of Evantras making it into even limited production is scant.*

**Where are they now?**

*The last announcement from Mazzanti was the lighter, purer, um, Pura model back in 2021, which apparently weighs 1,290kg and develops 750bhp from an LT2 V8. The Millecavalli version promises 1,200bhp from a twin turbo, 7.3-litre V8. The company doesn't have a website, and has gone ominously quiet on social media since it trailed a Venti version... of the Pura version... of the Evantra, back in May 2022.*

**WATCHES**

# Digital division

### From cheap and cheerful to pricey and posh – the digital watch is enjoying a bit of a comeback

**WORDS:** RICHARD HOLT

**WHAT IS A DIGITAL WATCH? CLOSE** your eyes and imagine one, and it's most likely something cheapish and battery powered. It is the watch equivalent of a Prius – you buy it for the job it does, not because you love it. But there is much more to digital than that.

Back in the 1880s, a man called Josef Pallweber patented a jumping hour mechanism. Instead of the analogue display of hands pointing to numbers, the hours appeared in a window, thanks to a little rotating wheel behind the dial. This was the world's first digital movement and was put into production in pocket watches made by IWC and others.

These early digital watches were popular for a while but faded out of fashion. As the watch moved from pocket to wrist in the early 20th century, most favoured analogue hands. Then, in the 1970s, electronic watches began to appear, and by the 1980s – led by brands Seiko and Casio – the LCD digital watch we know today became the budget watch of choice.

In the 1990s, the mechanical watch market enjoyed a renaissance that shows no sign of letting up. It looked for new creative directions and different ways to display the time. Manufacturers went big, went small, experimented with different materials and... revived the posh digital watch. Brands like AP and Cartier started making high end mechanical watches with jumping digital displays, and they've recently been joined by others.

## PRO TIP

*Don't diss quartz. The reason it took over in the 1980s is partly because of cost, but also because it outperforms clockwork in any way you can measure. It's cheaper, lighter, more accurate and more robust. Even fancy brands like Cartier use it in some of their watches. People prefer mechanical for the feel and craftsmanship, but you'll have to pay more for the privilege.*

## BLOW THE BUDGET

**Cartier Tank à Guichets**
The Tank 'Ticket Office' takes its name from the hour display, which must have reminded someone of an old station ticket window. First appearing in the 1920s, the watch was revived in the 1990s, early 2000s, and again this year. It has a handwound mechanical movement. **From £45,000; cartier.com**

## UNDER £5K

**Bremont Terra Nova Jumping Hour**
Bremont has released not one but two jumping hour watches this year. The narrow winner is the Terra Nova, with jumping hour, moving minute display and compass style small seconds indication. Powered by an automatic movement. **£4,900; bremont.com**

## UNDER £2K

**SpaceOne Jumping Hour**
French indie brand SpaceOne has its eyes on the cosmos, with a strong leaning towards the excitement of the 1950s space race. Displays the hours and minutes via a small portal in the aero styled carbon case. **£1,995; spaceonewatches.com**

## UNDER £150

**Svalbard Time Travel HX12**
The name Svalbard refers to an Arctic archipelago that inspired this newish brand. With jumping hour and a rev counter inspired retrograde minute hand. No mechanical movement, though – this is quartz powered. **£136; svalbard.watch**

# EPIC FAIL

**The finest failures in automotive history**

## LIFE F1

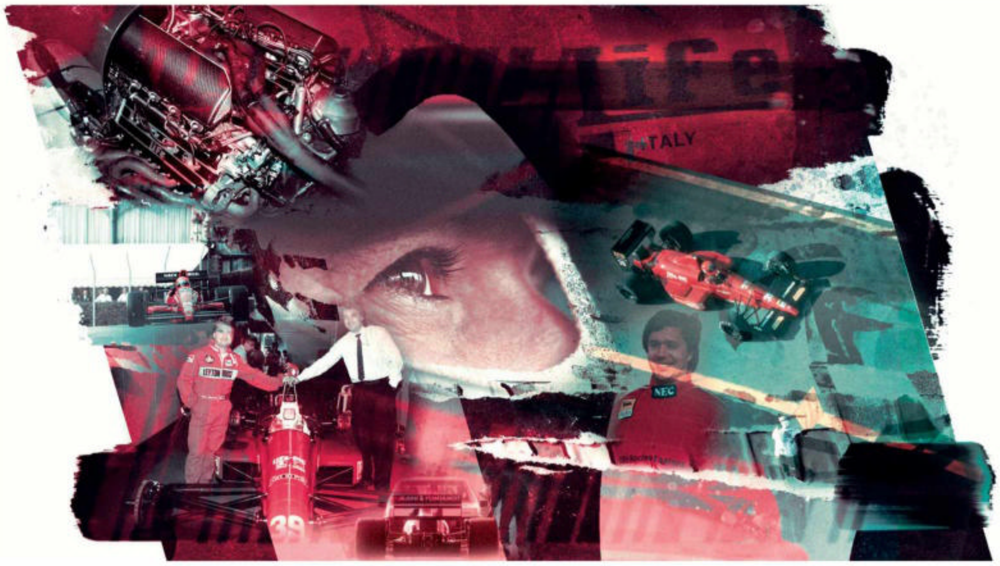
**WORDS:** SAM PHILIP

There are bad years, and then there's this. Life F1, 1990. Not only the worst season in the history of motorsport, but the worst season in the history of *any* sport.

It started with a W12 engine designed by ex-Ferrari engineer Franco Rocchi, and a mysterious Italian businessman named Ernesto Vita. As F1's turbo era came to an end in 1988, Vita – for reasons unclear – became convinced Rocchi's unusual W12 was the perfect fit for the new naturally aspirated 3.5-litre regulations. He commissioned Rocchi to build him a race W12, certain the orders would immediately come pouring in from the big F1 teams.

They didn't. Weirdly, the big teams weren't lining up to buy an unproven engine from an outfit with zero race experience. So, faced with an empty order book, did Vito throw in the towel? Did he hell. Clinging bravely yet stupidly to that towel, Vito started his own F1 team from scratch, determined to demonstrate the superiority of his magnificent new engine.

Spoiler alert: it was not superior. With Rocchi's W12 producing barely half the power of Honda's grid-topping V10, to call Life's L190 racer a rolling roadblock rather stretches the definition of 'rolling'.



> **"The big teams weren't lining up to buy an unproven engine from an outfit with zero race experience"**

At pre-qualifying for 1990's opening race in Phoenix, the L190 was 35 seconds off Gerhard Berger's eventual pole time, too slow even to make it through to quali. At Monaco, the L190 lapped 14 seconds off quali pace. In Mexico, it was nearly three *minutes* off. In 12 attempts, the W12 entirely failed to power Life out of pre-qualifying, instead opting to detonate in a variety of novel ways.

At the Portuguese Grand Prix, Vito bit the bullet, swapping out his beloved W12 for a Judd V8. It proved no more successful: after two more races failing to make the grid, Vito pulled the plug on Life. The team evaporated before the season was complete, exiting with vast debts and not a single race start to its name. That's proper failure. That's Life.

## THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

**AUDI TT RS**

| What is it? | Why are we interested? | So... it's a driver's car ? | Should I buy one? |
|---|---|---|---|
| *A 2.5-litre five pot that you can pick up in great condition for £30k. Not quite a Bugatti Chiron – 355bhp vs 1,578bhp – but still a great choice.* | *It's a coupe, it's all wheel drive and has some driving characteristics that are very similar to the Chiron. Honest.* | *The TT RS delivers on rapid cross country pace like you wouldn't believe – on back roads, it's a machine.* | *The TT RS does 0–62mph in 4.5 seconds and has a top speed of 174mph. For £16k–£50k, it's a lot of fun for the money.* |

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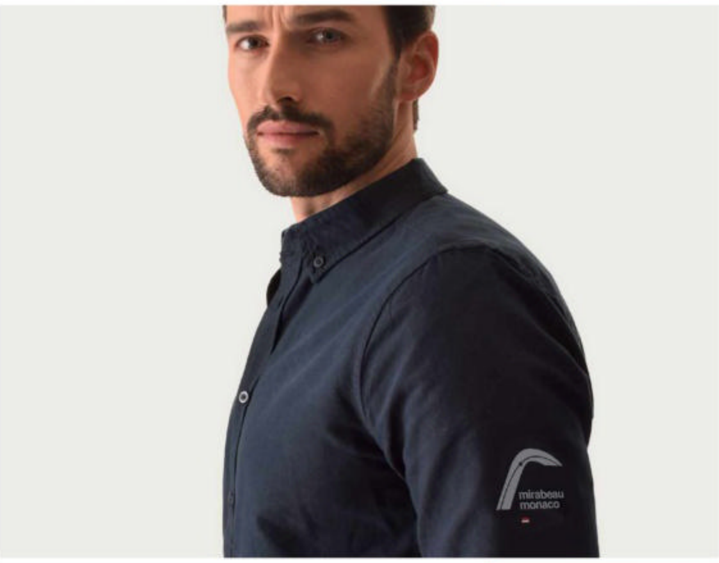
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100% GENUINE QUESTIONS

# HELP!

The internet's most searched questions, rudely answered by us

THIS MONTH: **EMERGENCY VEHICLES**

## 1. Can police cars break the speed limit?

Yes, but only when responding to emergencies, or when the local pie 'n' mash shop is just about to close.

## 2. Can ambulances break the speed limit?

Really interested in the whole 'breaking the speed limit' thing, huh? Once again, the answer's "yes, but only in an emergency". However, bear in mind that ambulances a) can weigh in excess of five tonnes and b) are often carrying patients with bits of their body sticking out in directions they really shouldn't be, which is why you rarely see ambulance drivers testing the limits of adhesion on a mini-roundabout.

## 3. Can fire engines break the speed limit?

Yeah, kinda figured that one was coming. Yet again, yes in an emergency. But bear in mind that, fully laden, a fire engine can weigh in excess of 17 tonnes. Which, at a speed of 100mph, would give it an approximate stopping distance of Bedfordshire.

## 4. Why are fire engines called fire engines?

Sigh. Sometimes it's difficult to know where to start with… OK, yeah, Help! concedes you may have a smidgen of an iota of a point here. After all, police cars contain police. Fish and chip vans contain fish and chips. Fire engines do not – unless something has gone very, very wrong – contain fire. Then again, monster trucks don't contain monsters, and apparently you have no problem with those, so we're going to go right ahead and file this one under 'waste of time questions'.

## 5. Why don't ambulances always use their sirens?

Because it's not *permanently* an emergency?

## 6. Why do police cars follow you?

To admire your precise and law abiding road skills.

## 7. Can fire engines use sea water?

Yes, but only if they're responding to an emergency involving either a) a dangerously thirsty dolphin or b) some dangerously under-pickled gherkins.

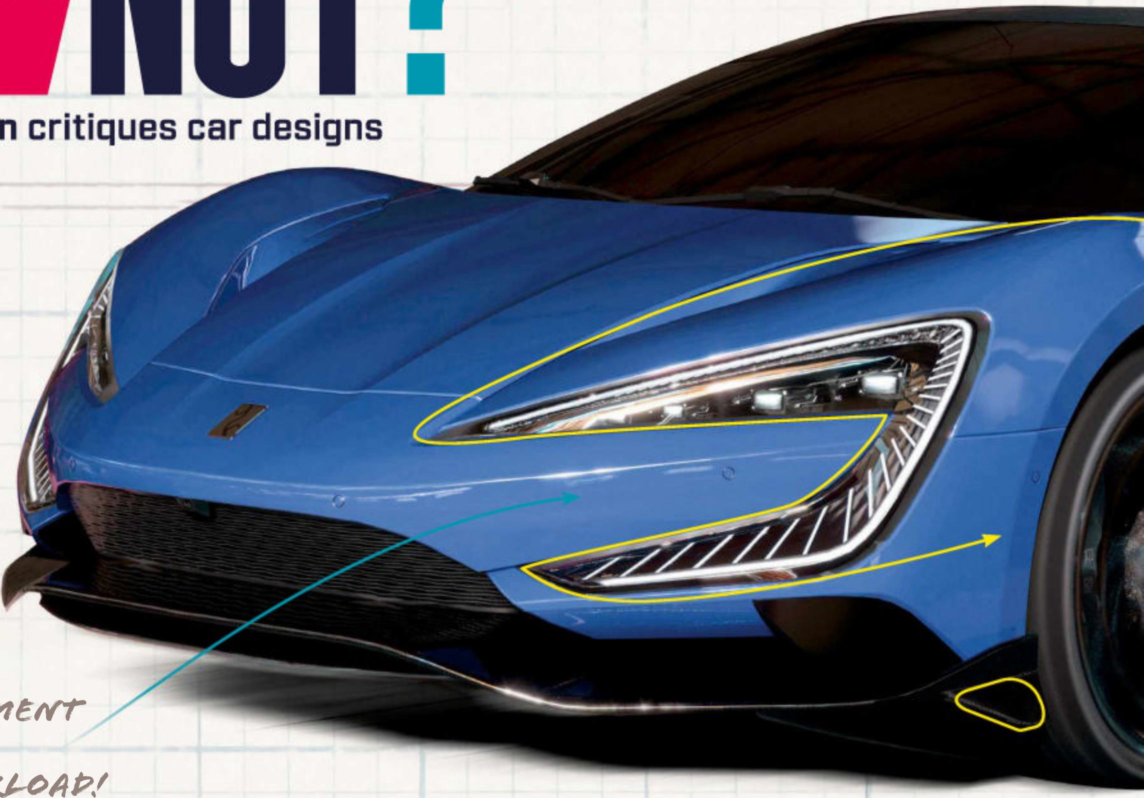
## 8. Why are police cars red?

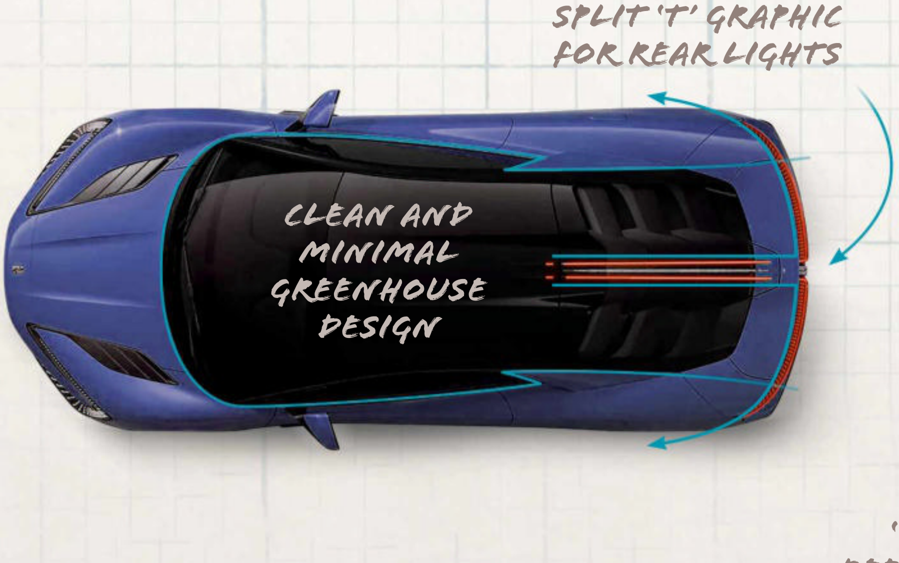
If you're in London, that's because they're part of the Met's Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection group, a unit that provides security to high profile political and consulate figures. If you're outside of London, that's not a police car, that's a post van.

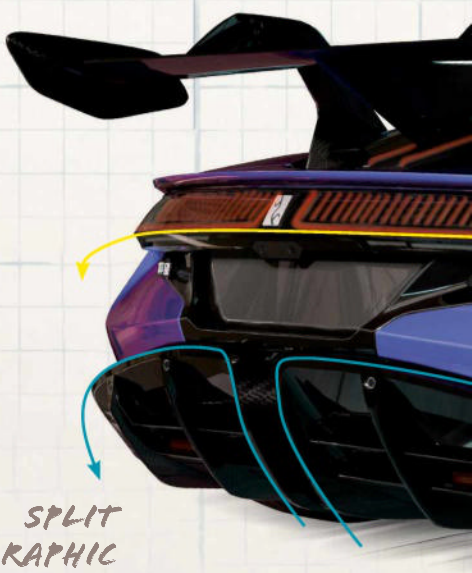
**IMAGE:** MANUFACTURER, GETTY

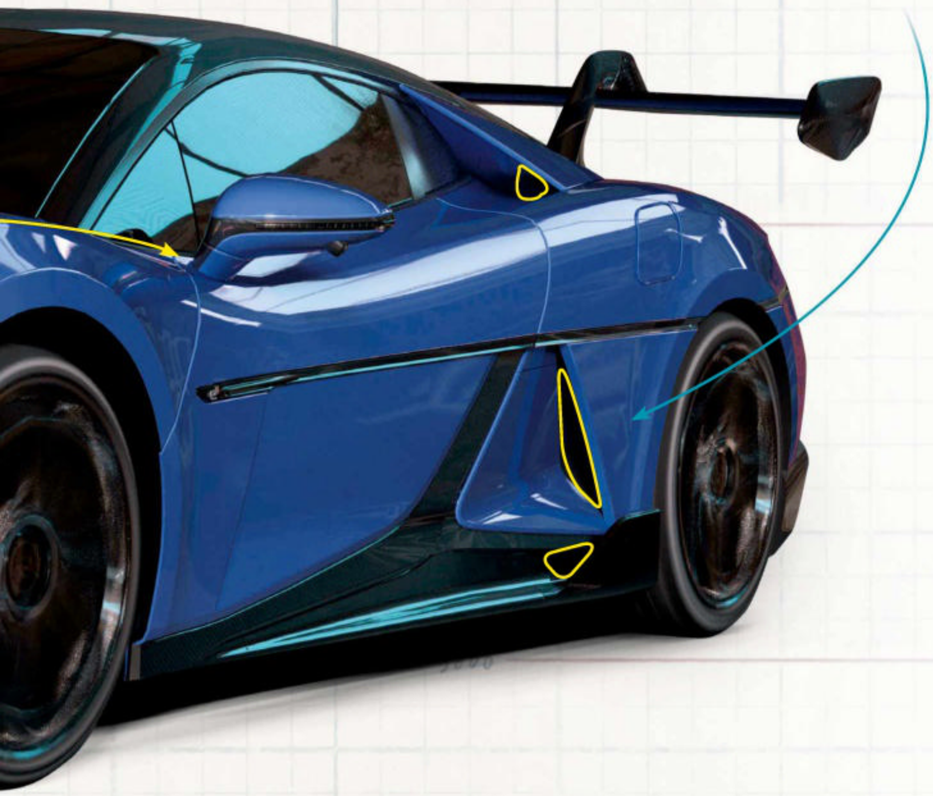
# HOT OR NOT?

**Frank Stephenson critiques car designs**

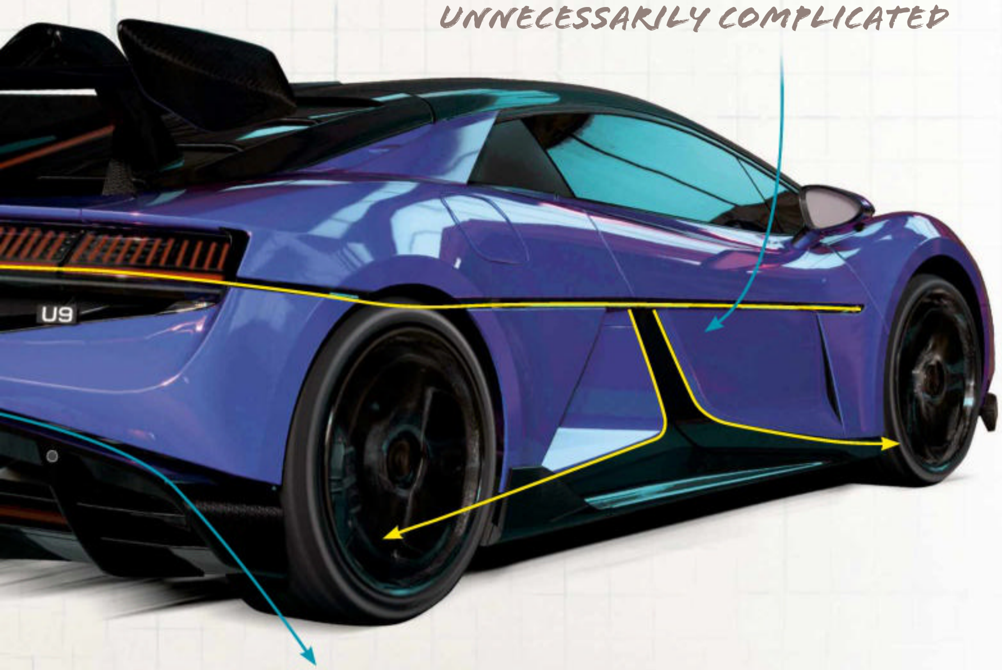

HEADLAMP ELEMENT SCREAMS OF AESTHETIC OVERLOAD!


SPLIT 'T' GRAPHIC FOR REAR LIGHTS
CLEAN AND MINIMAL GREENHOUSE DESIGN


SPLIT 'T' GRAPHIC REPEATED FOR REAR DIFFUSER



THOUGHTFULLY PLACED AERO AND COOLING ELEMENTS



MATERIAL BREAK ELEMENT SEEMS UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED

**What's Frank up to?**

He's no stranger to China, with trips aimed at getting flying cars (VTOL) on the way to production. He's also just launched an eyewear range and is working on a "very exciting update" in the automotive world

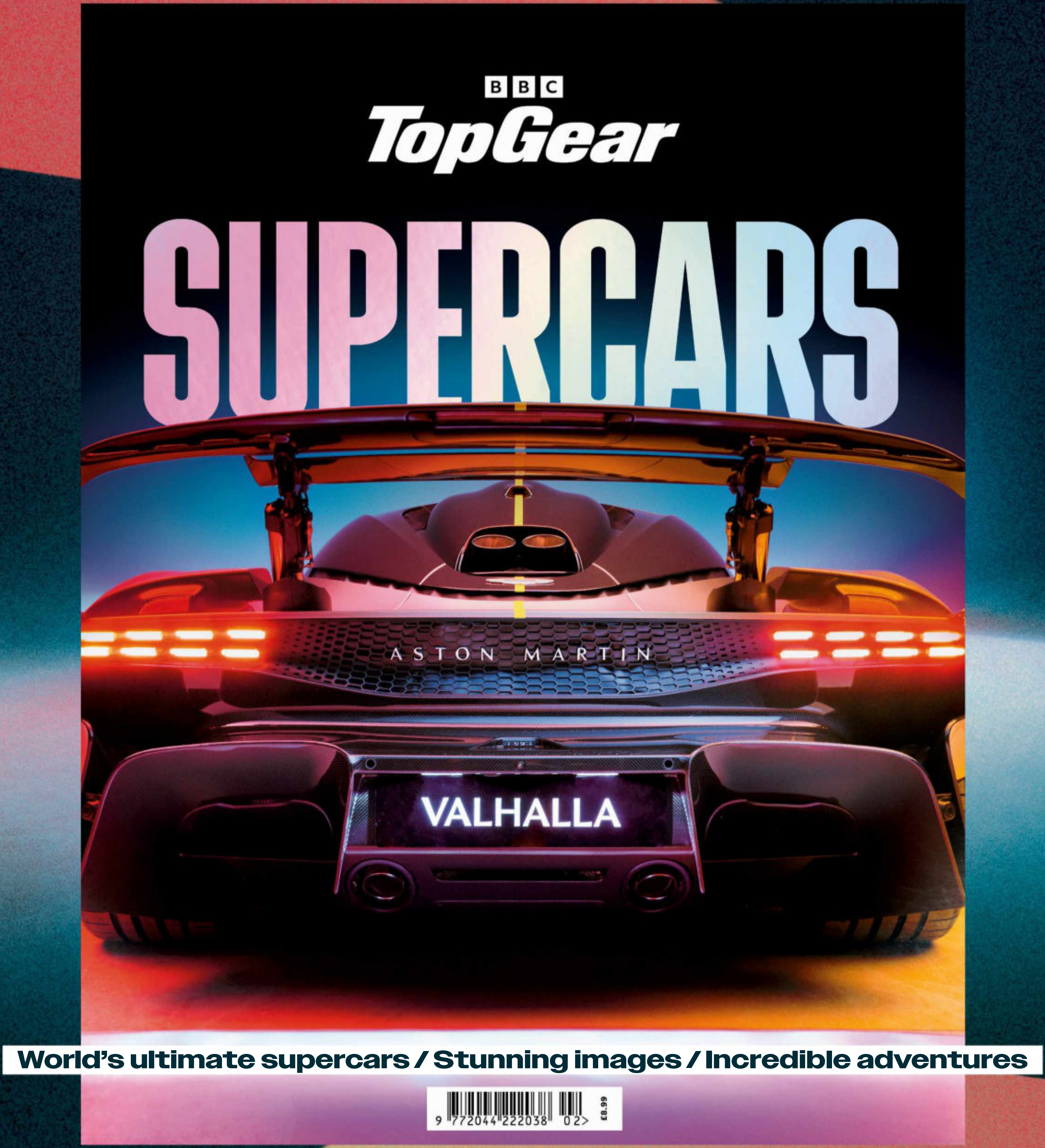
# Yangwang U9

**A NEW WAVE OF CHINESE CAR DESIGN IS** upon us. While traditional European and US marques play it safe, Yangwang has thrown the rulebook out of the window. The Chinese are not merely catching up, they're looking further ahead, charting a future in which they define the direction of aesthetics and performance. The U9's design is unapologetically extrovert. Rather than conforming to European or US tastes, the U9 shows how the Chinese design language is evolving, without any heritage or baggage from the past holding them back.

But the U9 is far from visually harmonious. The convergence of edginess and the abundance of design elements are something closer to a *Fast & Furious* fantasy than an attempt at timelessness. There is energy, but aesthetic overload has been the route taken to achieve it. As a result, while the U9 will turn heads, it will struggle to earn the kind of enduring respect reserved for the supercar greats.

Still, there's something thrilling about the audacity. Yangwang isn't playing it safe – whether you love or question the result, that in itself is a sign that the balance of power in automotive design is shifting.

**VERDICT:** **NOT**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# ON SALE 18 JUNE

# TOP 9 PRODUCTION CARS UPSTAGED BY CONCEPTS

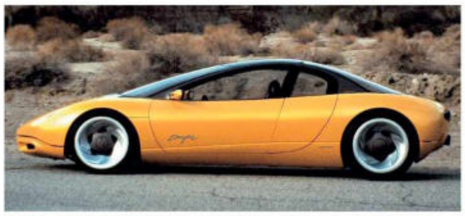
WORDS: GREG POTTS

### A90 TOYOTA SUPRA

Toyota actually unveiled the stunning FT-1 concept – which married influences from old Supras and the 2000GT – at the beginning of 2014. At this point there were no firm plans for a new Supra, so when it came to redressing a BMW Z4 a lot of the concept car's drama was lost.

### RENAULT CAPTUR

Making its debut at the 2011 Geneva show, the Captur concept was a sporty two door SUV with 22 inch wheels, a removable hard top roof and a centre exit exhaust. It even had a twin turbo four pot engine. The 2013 production car was basically just a bloated Clio.



### PONTIAC SUNFIRE

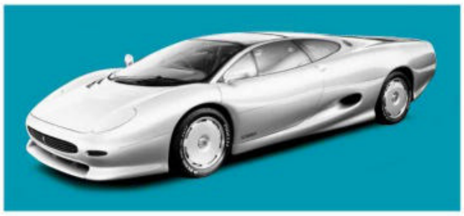
Built on GM's J-body FWD platform, the 1995 Pontiac Sunfire was a woeful thing in coupe, cabrio or saloon form. And yet, at the start of the decade Pontiac got everyone excited with the futuristic Sunfire concept. Heck, it even had carbon fibre body panels and a voice activated phone inside.

### KIA NIRO

Another crossover concept that promised much and delivered... a crossover, was the Kia Niro. In late 2013 Kia used Robert De's surname for the first time on a show car that featured a stainless steel roof, butterfly doors and rally style spotlights.

### CHRYSLER PT CRUISER

Before Daimler came along, Chrysler was planning on selling the PT Cruiser as a Plymouth. Same retro 1930s hot rod styling as the Prowler, you see? Oh, and the PT Cruiser could have actually looked pretty cool too – just see the original three door Pronto Cruizer concept from the late 1990s for proof. Shame.



### JAGUAR XJ220

At the British Motor Show in 1988, Jaguar showed a monstrous V12 supercar. It promised 4WD, four wheel steering, adjustable suspension and scissor doors. The production version was signed off just as recession hit, and customers withdrew their deposits upon finding out it had none of the concept's features.

### MERCEDES-BENZ EQS

The Vision EQS concept from back in 2019 had us thinking big electric Mercs of the future would be full of tech but also hugely dramatic to look at. We were correct on the former, but when the production EQS arrived in 2021 it looked more like a flabby pebble than an executive saloon.

### SUZUKI KIZASHI

You probably don't remember the production version of the Suzuki Kizashi. Why would you? It's hard to forget the first concept that previewed it though. The Kizashi 1 was a gloriously 2000s slammed estate concept with an Alfa Brera bum and massive 21 inch wheels.

### CHEVROLET VOLT

How good does the 2007 Chevrolet Volt range extender concept look with its chunky arches, chopped roof and windows reaching into the doors? Unfortunately a financial crash meant what we got instead was a Prius shaped plug-in hybrid that you might better know as the Vauxhall Ampera.

# MIKE'S CHANNEL

## Q: CAN THE *OUT RUN* MOVIE BE GOOD?

It's been a bit of a red letter month for me, or perhaps more accurately a red Testarossa month. News recently broke that fresh off the back of the *Sonic the Hedgehog* movies, which generated a billion dollars and introduced a whole new generation of kids to Jim Carrey's hypermobile face, Sega's next Hollywood project is going to be a movie based on legendary arcade racing game *Out Run*. This appeals to me on two counts, firstly I'm a huge fan of the original video game and secondly I find bad movies just as entertaining as good ones. Yes I'm aware there's something wrong with me.

Alright, we don't know for sure that the *Out Run* movie will be terrible. It'll feature talented *Euphoria* and *White Lotus* star Sydney Sweeney, who is also a producer on the project, and Michael Bay has been attached to direct. Regardless of how you feel about the dizzying CGI washing machine that is the *Transformers* franchise, if you've seen his 1996 movie *The Rock* you'll know that the man can direct a Ferrari car chase.

The problem is, describing the *Out Run* game as light on plot is like describing *War and Peace* as "a bit long". There is a start line, a finish line and you are compelled to drive between the two by the immaculate summer roadtrip vibes. With such a thin premise, the writers of the movie are going to feel obliged to introduce things like shadowy criminal gangs, a *soupçon* of personal tragedy and an irritating comic relief character just to keep the story moving along.

The *Need for Speed* movie released in 2014 took that approach and disappeared mostly without a trace, even though it starred *Breaking Bad*'s Aaron Paul and, thanks to its exceptionally crashy race sequences, featured more irretrievably ruined supercars than the car park at Mansory. Sony's *Gran Turismo* tie-in movie avoided the cliches only because it was a film less about the content of the game itself and more about the real life winner of the GT Academy competition Jann Mardenborough. And even then it threw in an incongruous *Grand Theft Auto* inspired police chase that implied that the otherwise clean cut Jann should have spent the second half of the film in a local magistrate's court rather than at a racetrack.

Look, I've seen enough dire video game adaptations to know that, statistically, the *Out Run* movie will almost certainly be a disaster, if it makes it to cinema screens at all. Still I can't help being just a little excited for the prospect of a sun kissed road movie based on one of the most influential racing games of all time. Shows like *The Last of Us* and *Fallout* have demonstrated that these days Hollywood has an improved understanding of what makes video games tick. And if the worst comes to the worst, I'll happily waste 112 minutes sitting in the dark drooling over a Ferrari Testarossa. In fact that's been a fairly standard evening for me since the age of six.

*Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many video games*

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

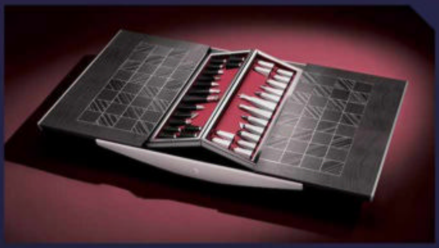
# GAME OF THE MONTH

### FORZA HORIZON 5

**£55, Playstation 5**

You might be looking at this month's game of the month and wondering if you've suffered some sort of head injury. Or wondering if we have. Didn't *Forza Horizon 5* come out nearly four years ago? Well yes, it did, just not on PlayStation 5. Xbox's flagship racer is now available on Sony's console, rubbing shoulders with longtime rival *Gran Turismo*. And while other games released on PS5, such as *The Crew* Motorfest offered capable tribute acts, *Horizon* remains the top dog. What's more, if you own a PS5 Pro, it's actually the prettiest console version of the game available. If you're a staunch PlayStation loyalist who has not yet had the opportunity to bathe Mexico in tyre smoke, it's still a great time to remedy that. And as for the previously bitterly fought console wars between Xbox and PlayStation, this feels like the unlikely Christmas Day football match we've all been waiting for. **MC**

## GEAR



### ROLLS-ROYCE CHESS SET

**rolls-roycemotorcars.com; £30,960**

This isn't just any chess set, it's the incredibly expensive Rolls-Royce of chess sets. Handcrafted from aluminium, wood veneer and leather, it unfurls "in a smooth, single theatrical motion". Plus, the playing pieces are ceramic coated aluminium designed to feel like the organ stops in the R-R sitting on your drive.

### LEGO *2 FAST 2 FURIOUS* S2000

**Lego.com; £22.99**

Lego has extended its *Fast & Furious* collection with Suki and her bridge jumping, flame splitting, hot pink Honda S2000. The Speed Champions replica has the same anime-style livery along the sides and Lego has done its best to recreate the original VeilSide bodykit and Motegi Racing alloys. There's also a huge rear wing to help you get all of the downforce on a tabletop speed run.

### PUMA ULTRA RACETRACK JAPAN FOOTBALL BOOTS

**Prodirectsport.com; £280**

Launched just before the 2025 Japanese Grand Prix, these Puma football boots were designed in collaboration with Pro:Direct Soccer and pay tribute to Suzuka. With details like the overall race distance and the lap record, they're actually pretty nerdy, but if they make our footwork anything like Ayrton Senna's they'll be worth every penny.

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# BOV

JETHRO BOVINGDON

## What exactly is going on with McLaren, wonders Jethro

On the face of it McLaren has everything. A rich history including the most iconic road car of all time, nine constructors' titles in F1, a personal story that takes in humble beginnings, personal triumph, outrageous Can-Am racers and cruel tragedy. Plus, it is dominating at the highest echelons of motorsport once again and has just announced a return to Le Mans in the Hypercar class. Oh, and the 750S is one of the greatest supercars ever made. What a dream.

Yet it has just been taken over by Forseven. What is Forseven, you might ask? Well, quite. The LinkedIn page proudly states it is "Crafting unforgettable cars that blend British luxury with visionary technologies, forever." It's true that nobody has forgotten any of the cars. Mostly because the company hasn't actually made any.

Forseven is owned by CYVN Holdings, a fund backed by the Abu Dhabi government that has recently also acquired McLaren Automotive. It's 700 people strong, has a tech agreement with Chinese manufacturer Nio, is made up of notable ex-JLR staff and is described by the *Financial Times* as an "all-EV British startup".

Has your heart sunk yet? Mine too. To be fair, something had to be done. The road car division of McLaren has been haemorrhaging cash for years now and its former owner (Mumtalakat, the Bahraini sovereign wealth fund) has cried enough after some £1.5 billion of investment. It's been so disastrous that McLaren had to sell its incredible headquarters and lease it back to free up some money.

Why the endless turmoil? I'm sure the full answer is deeply complex. But in a world where product is king, it can be boiled down to some very simple things: overproliferation of models in the early years; too many reliability woes; oversupply; cookie cutter design. The knock on effect to all of this is historically poor residuals compared to Ferrari and Porsche's special models. Restoring buyer confidence when even fantastic cars like the 750S are half price seven minutes after the owner picks them up is very, very difficult.

How do you solve a problem like McLaren? I don't proclaim to know. But all the noises emerging from the dark recesses of the internet suggest Forseven's leaders hope the answer is, erm, an SUV with an EV powertrain. I mean, why not? It literally hasn't worked for *anyone* else, the entire concept is in direct opposition to McLaren's brand values and history and it doesn't address the real issues at hand with, for example, the Artura. But other than that it sounds a solid plan.

The wildest thing of all is that the one guy I would trust to turn McLaren Automotive around works within the same building. His name is Zak Brown. He loves cars. He gets McLaren and he's made the F1 outfit (which CYVN has bought a much smaller stake in) a winning operation with an intelligent, fiercely competitive and consistent approach. It took him six years to get it back to the top, with many ups and downs along the way. The road car division is an even bigger project, yet Forseven claims to have a turnaround plan that will be executed "at incredible pace". Oh dear. Zak… have a word, will you?

> **"Forseven's leaders hope the answer is, erm, an SUV with an EV powertrain"**

*Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars*

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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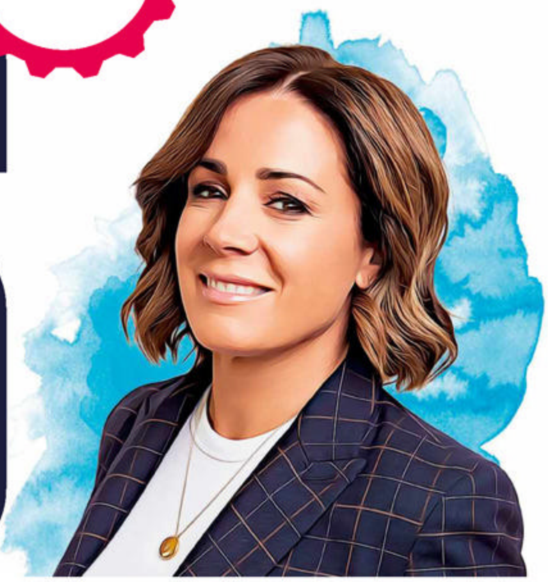
# PINKS

**NATALIE PINKHAM**



## Plastri and Norris are opposites, who'll take the title?

McLaren has finally produced a car capable of winning a championship but has a driver pairing in Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris that goes about their craft in very different ways. Question is, who's more likely to take their maiden drivers' title?

Oscar Piastri – the cerebral assassin. He races like he's solving a complex puzzle at 200mph. Methodical, calm and precise, he makes very few mistakes. Andrea Stella's described him as having "no noise" in his head, clinical from lights out to chequered flag.

He neither celebrates victory nor laments defeat. His mum recounts a story where she and Oscar were cycling, and she went over the handlebars. He was wearing a heart rate monitor and when they got home, they looked at the reading – it shot up when he saw the crash. "So you do have a heart," she said. "You just rarely show it!"

Oscar has methodically worked through any driving weaknesses. Understanding the nuances of each track, tyre management and a qualifying deficit to Lando had all been chinks in his armour… not anymore. Now he drives with such authority that the other drivers respond differently to him when they go wheel to wheel. He exudes confidence, and his competitors feel it.

> "We have one very fast car, two drivers and only one championship up for grabs"

Then there's Lando – charismatic, mercurial and with star quality. He wears his heart on his sleeve. His pace is undeniable, especially in qualifying and, when he is on form, he can extract magic from the car. His tendency to publicly criticise himself is one of the more intriguing aspects of his personality – and one that sets him apart from his peers (bar perhaps Charles Leclerc), because in an era where drivers are often media trained to within an inch of their lives, Lando is refreshingly open, and at times brutally honest.

His self criticism shows a high degree of self awareness and accountability. When Lando underperforms, or makes a strategic misjudgement, he rarely blames the team or circumstances – he owns it. I love this openness – it makes for much more compelling interviews for a start. It's endearing, relatable, and earns him respect from fans around the world. It also shows a strong internal drive to improve. As Sebastian Vettel told us recently on Sky Sports, it is the most natural thing in the world to doubt yourself, and yet it is the most unnatural to talk about it.

However there is a fine line between self assessment and self flagellation. Overdo it and it could take a toll on his confidence, and undermine that of the team around him. His introspective streak can be powerful fuel for growth, but it also raises questions about how well Lando manages the psychological pressure of competing at the highest level. It makes him relatable but also vulnerable.

So we have one very fast car, two drivers ready for the biggest stage and only one driver championship up for grabs. Zak Brown has a role to play here – managing the rivalry and eventually enforcing team orders, because there are a handful of others (including Max eyeing up his fifth consecutive world title) who are gathering vital points while the two McLarens take bites out of each other. Place your bets.

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*Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind the scenes access to the paddock and drivers*

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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# THE GODFATHER

## PART II

**WORDS** JACK RIX

**PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

Alfa only has one full blooded mid-engined supercar in its back catalogue... this makes it two

# AS I CIRCLE THE 33 STRADALE, BATHED IN SPRING SUNSHINE

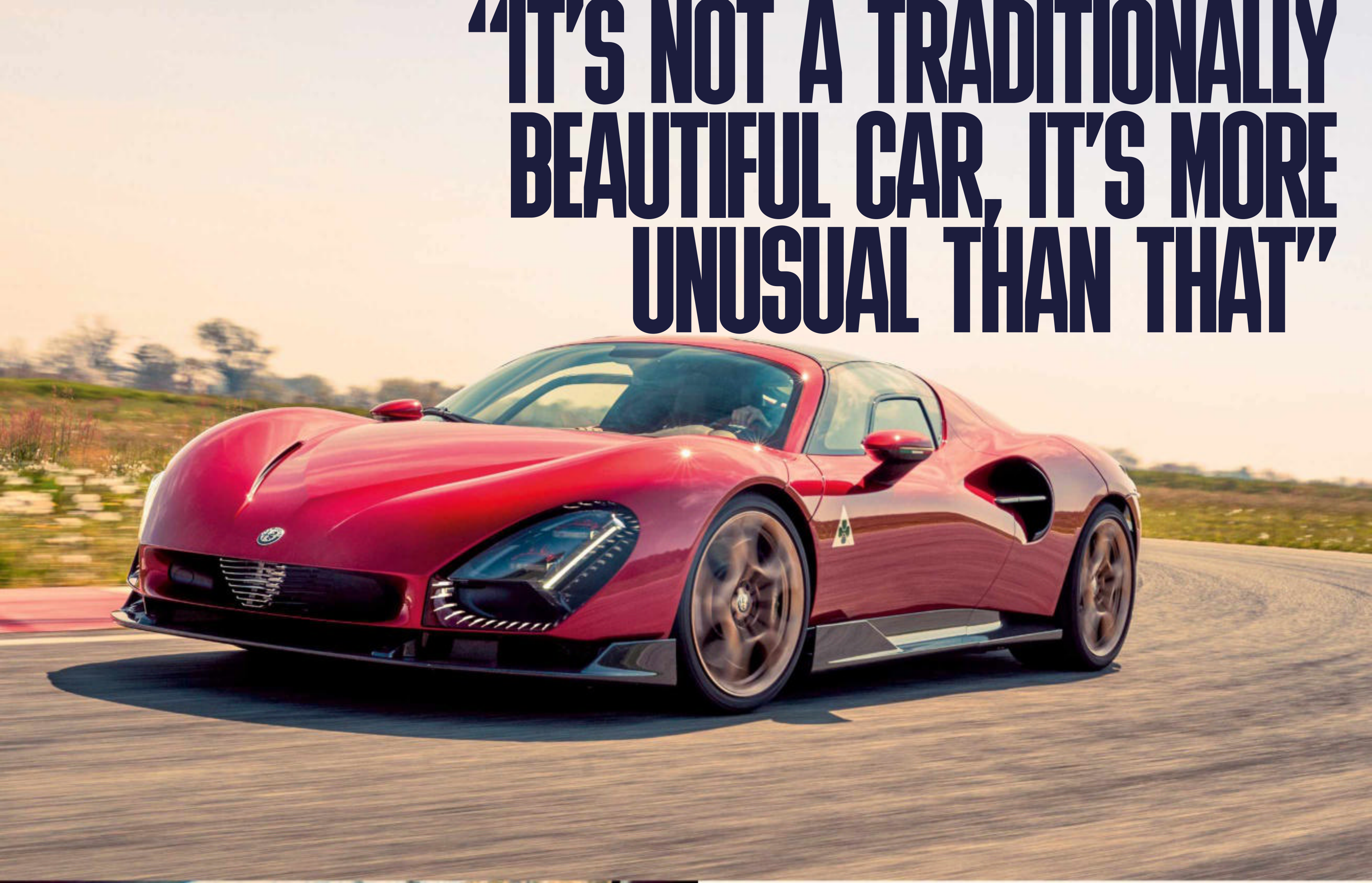
in the courtyard of Alfa's Balocco test track, I'm confused. My primal instinct is to sink to my knees and kiss its tyres while making grunting noises and flamboyant hand gestures. This, after all, is a bright red Italian supercar with an Alfa badge on it, but I can't stop thinking about those painfully glamorous fashion shows where models glide up and down the catwalk in artfully torn bin bags, the great wall of celebs watching on, enthralled by the genius of Jean-Paul Poopier's winter collection. How much does the weight of a brand, or a designer, cloud your judgement?

We are programmed to believe Alfas are beautiful, and this is a modern take on arguably Alfa Romeo's (and therefore the world's) most beautiful car. Could it ever be anything other than knee quiveringly attractive? For that reason I'm on the fence, for now. Some context: the original 33 Stradale from the 1960s (designed by Franco Scaglione) was a road version of the Tipo 33 racer. Scaglione was a designer with such treats as the Alfa BAT cars and Lamborghini 350 GTV on his CV – but the 33 was his Mona Lisa and only 18 of them were ever made. In recent times we've had the rather lovely and very noisy 8C, and the rather less lovely 4C, but the 33 Stradale is the only proper, full fat mid-engined supercar in Alfa's back catalogue. You can see why a modern resurrection is kind of a big deal.

And like its forefather, vanishingly rare. Alfa will make 33 of this new version. That's it. At launch it was offered with either a twin turbo V6 (the one we're driving) or a pure electric tri-motor powertrain. Like Maserati, who recently canned the electric MC20 Folgore because of the lack of demand, Alfa will be doing the same here – only a handful of customers were even interested in the EV version and in the end all 33 customers went for combustion. In the business of electric sports cars? Might be time to pull the rip cord. Each can be customised to your heart's desire of course – Alfa is classing all 33 as one-offs, and they will be manufactured by Italian coachbuilder Touring Superleggera, which immediately makes them 46 per cent cooler.

Sorry, did I mention they cost £1.7m each? No, not a typo, you can have one of these or eight Maserati MC20s, a car it shares a good chunk of its undercarriage with. Perhaps the greatest achievement here isn't the styling, or the way it drives, but – for a company that doesn't possess a book of 'preferred' customers, like

# “IT’S NOT A TRADITIONALLY BEAUTIFUL CAR, IT’S MORE UNUSUAL THAN THAT”



The little man being eaten looks thrilled to be on such an illustrious key fob

PISTA
STRADA
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**ALFA ROMEO 33 STRADALE**

**Price:** £1.7m
**Engine:** 3.0-litre TT V6, 621bhp, 538lb ft
**Transmission:** 8spd DCT, RWD
**Performance:** 0–62mph in 3.0secs, 207mph
**Weight:** 1,500kg (approx)

> “WE HAD ALFA’S TEST TRACK AND THE KEYS TO OURSELVES”

Ferrari, Porsche and Lambo, who take one of everything – actually flogging 33 cars at such a hyper inflated price. Cristiano Fiorio, Alfa’s global marketing boss and the driving force behind the 33 Stradale project, talks about the process of finding 33 signatures from a standing start. First port of call? Original 33 Stradale owners, then ticking off renowned car collectors, including Ralph Lauren, who he approached through the ‘Contact us’ link on Ralph’s website. Fiorio is one of us.

The car here is Alfa’s own development prototype, chassis zero if you like – one that’s within a whisker of production finish but not quite as polished as the 33 customer cars. It’s the one it’ll continue to update and keep forever, so expect to see it on every magazine test from now until the end of time, on the few occasions they let it out the stable. We had the entire day, Alfa’s test track (the car isn’t yet road registered), glorious Italian sunshine and the keys to ourselves. Tough day at the office.

To address the ‘just a Maserati MC20 in a fancy frock’ debate, yes the two are deeply related – they share same carbon tub (the lower half at least, the 33’s upper bits are all new) and aluminium subframes at either end. The engines are closely related 3.0-litre

Many cows and many aluminiums died in the making of this spectacular interior

twin turbo V6s although the Alfa does away with Maserati's clever, efficiency enhancing pre-chamber ignition. The Alfa's suspension is unique though – the multi-link with adaptive dampers setup from the hardcore Giulia GTAm. Beyond that the exterior and interior design is quite obviously all Alfa. Are we bothered by the parts sharing? Not massively, the mechanical simplicity and use of proven components was always Alfa's intention – it didn't want to bite off some huge technical challenge like the Aston Valkyrie or AMG One, it wanted to focus on what Alfa does well – style, emotion and playing hard on the history and romance of the brand.

The twin turbo V6 produces an identical 621bhp to the MC20 (and pushes along roughly the same 1,500kg kerbweight) while sending its power to the rear wheels via an eight speed twin clutch gearbox. Top speed is a claimed 207mph (or 333kph, geddit?) a little higher than the MC20 and 0–62mph takes 3.0secs. It's not slow, although I'm convinced that my internal gyrometer has been permanently ruined by gazillion horsepower hypercars and face contorting EVs, because my brain categorises it as 'pleasingly rapid' rather than violent or shocking. And you know what? It's all the better for it – this is throttle travel you can actually use, often, both on the road and on track.

It has that same fizzy, infectious character as the MC20's engine – minimal lag, elastic power band and an orchestra of noises ranging from guttural huff on throttle to the turbo whistling away in the background. The gearbox is smooth in Strada mode and gives you a kick in the back in Pista, while the carbon ceramic brakes need a firm push but offer decent feel even from cold, so no complaints.

Bury it and it can shift, it makes interesting noises, it feels like an event, but like the Ferrari F80, the question must be asked – is a twin turbo V6 special enough for a car worth such an insane amount of money? In the £200k MC20 it's a good match, but here I'm looking for a little more, especially when the much cheaper Alfa 8C's V8 produced one of motoring's great noises. The powertrain is characterful, effective and by no means a hindrance to the red blooded Alfa experience, but we're talking almost GMA T.50 money here, and look at the engine you get in that...

The steering is weightier than I expected but meshes nicely with the engine's slightly grittier character, and I'm pleased to

Favourite angle of the 33? We call this one 'put your hands up for Turin'

Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

report there's nothing gritty about the ride or general flow of guiding the 33 down the road. It's something we loved about the Maserati MC20, its relaxed gait, its light tread on the road surface and just enough body roll to make it feel alive beneath you. That's all here in spades, which means, yes, it's a car you could drive on track, but why risk it? The 33 Stradale will give its best on an undulating B-road – elegant little slides out of tight corners and fast, flowing progress riding the torque from the engine fizzing away over your shoulder. It's a joyous way to travel and deserves to be used regularly – save the Valkyrie for track days, take this one to the shops.

And prepare to get a lot of attention at Asda. It's not a traditionally beautiful car, it's more unusual than that, but it feels brave and confident and looks unlike anything else built in the last 50 years. The nods to the original are everywhere – the bulbous headlights (complete with 33 LED 'lashes'), the windscreen surround, the way the doors cut so dramatically into the roof, creating an X-shaped carbon roll cage when viewed from above. The double hinged doors are pure theatre, as are the forged and then milled aluminium wheels – I don't even mind the gold. The side intakes ape the OG as do the cutouts on the rear flanks leading to the single round tail-lights. It references the past, but doesn't cling to it.

The interior though, is the best bit – a million miles from the MC20's plasticky, sparse cabin. The 33 feels expensive because the focus is on tactility before technology, which is a philosophy we all need right now. Note the intricate aluminium and leather three spoke wheel with zero buttons, the vents hidden within the sweeping dash, the ribbed leather and hunks of machined aluminium everywhere. The commitment to analogue is commendable on the knurled switches, levers and buttons above your head (instant *Top Gun* vibes) and on the centre console, one of which is dedicated entirely to answering your phone. Toggle another and a screen emerges from behind the dash and once your nav/climate/music is sorted you send it back from whence it came. A Quadrifoglio button shortcuts to exhaust flaps open for Maximum Antisocial in Strada, and activates launch control in Pista.

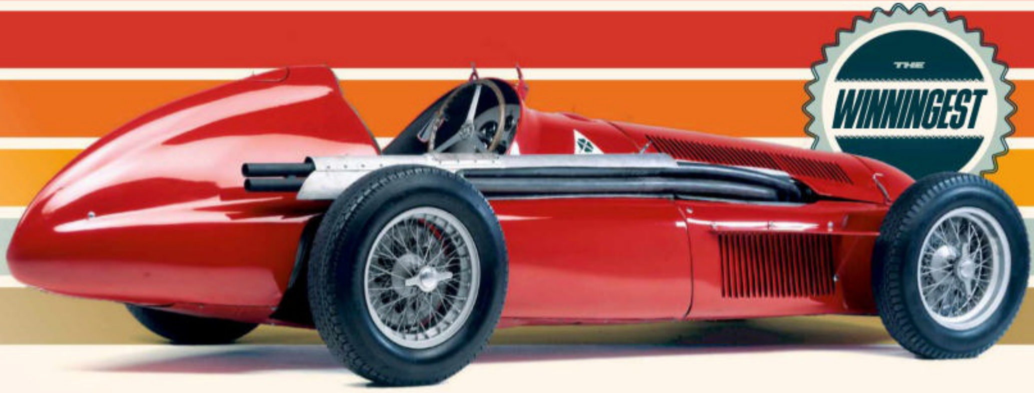
The doors aren't just for showing off either. You're surrounded almost totally by glass giving a sense of more space than there actually is, and a largely unimpeded view out. The rear window is polycarbonate in a nod to the 33's racing roots, and offers a viewpoint to a sexy Alfa badge under there, but regrettably not the entire engine. There are two basic interior configurations – Tributo or Corse. The former, as we sampled, is biscuit leather and slate and the correct one to go for, the latter is slathered in carbon and Alcantara and veers dangerously into Ferrari territory. But if your pockets are deep enough, anything's possible.

Let's dismount the fence. I tried to fight it, I really did, but it's an utterly gorgeous bright red Alfa Romeo mid-engined supercar and I want to lick it – the interior especially. That being said, limiting it to 33 cars at £1.7m a pop alienates the Alfa faithful and will make it harder to drive regularly in the manner it deserves to, because there's nothing fragile or overly complicated beneath the *haute couture* shell. The sad truth is these days it's easier to sell a handful of supercars to the mega rich than a whole load more, at a lower price point, to the merely very wealthy. You won't be seeing one on every street corner, but the world's always a better place with 33 new Alfa supercars in it.

# HALL OF FAME/SHAME

The 33 glorious highs and (mostly rust related) lows of Alfa Romeo – Italy's most Italian manufacturer

**WORDS** SAM PHILIP
**PHOTOGRAPHY** MANUFACTURER



## 1922

### RLTF

**● HIT**

Alfa was race first, road second. In the hands of Ugo Sivocci, the lightened, 6cyl RLTF gave AR its first big international race victory, taking the chequered flag in the 1923 Targa Florio. A couple of months later, the RLTF won the Ravenna Grand Prix, handing a first win to an ambitious young driver by the name of Enzo Ferrari. Enzo would run Alfa's race outfit, before departing to establish his own car company. Whatever happened to those guys?

## 1932

### P3 TIPO B

**● HIT**

Vittorio Jano's 8cyl, twin supercharged masterpiece – and the world's first true single seater GP racecar – dominated track racing in the early 1930s, establishing Alfa as the Red Bull of the era, only 1,000 per cent cooler. Though it started life making just over 200bhp, the P3's output would reach a faintly terrifying 330bhp by 1935. That power would prove just enough to secure one of history's all time underdog victories in the '35 German GP.

## 1935

### 6C 2300 PESCARA SPYDER

**● MISS**

The 6C was expensive, powerful and unquestionably beautiful. Unfortunately it was also a favourite of Italian dictator and all round bad egg, Benito Mussolini. In the 1930s, Mussolini brought Alfa under his control, establishing it as a sportswashing instrument of the fascist Italian state. Alfa's always struggled to disentangle itself from national politics, but the late 1930s were a low ebb.

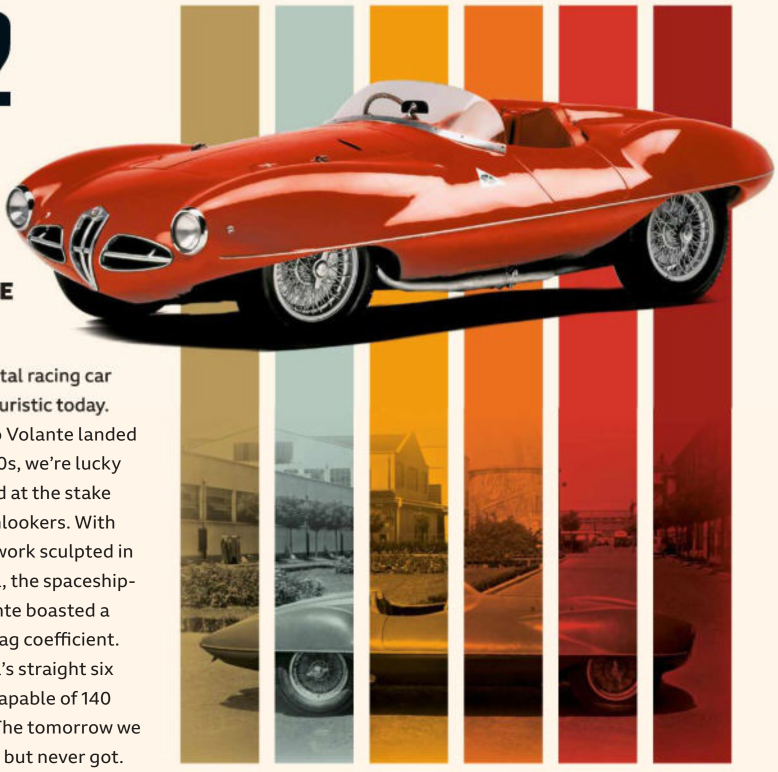
## 1950

### 158 ALFETTA

**● HIT**

Though it was a decade old design by 1950, the supercharged 158 won every race of the inaugural season of the F1 World Championship in which it competed, delivering the driver's title to Giuseppe Farina. Lightly fettled for 1951, it took Juan Manuel Fangio to victory that season too. Three quarters of a century later, Alfa's yet to add to those back to back F1 titles. As milestones go, at least the 158's a pretty one.

## 1952



### DISCO VOLANTE

● HIT

This experimental racing car looks wildly futuristic today. When the Disco Volante landed in the early 1950s, we're lucky it wasn't burned at the stake by panicking onlookers. With enclosed bodywork sculpted in the wind tunnel, the spaceship-like Disco Volante boasted a radically low drag coefficient. Fitted with Alfa's straight six engine, it was capable of 140 miles an hour. The tomorrow we were promised, but never got.

## 1952

### AR MATTA

● MISS

Italy's answer to the Willys Jeep and Land Rover, a whole lot more unnecessarily complicated than either. Developed in response to a request from the Italian government for a light reconnaissance vehicle, the Matta was offered in military and civilian guise. Sophisticated suspension meant it would get very off road. Complex 1.9-litre petrol engine (complete with twin overhead cams) meant it probably wouldn't get back.

THE MOST RADICAL

## 1953

### BAT 5

● HIT

Another Alfa low drag experiment, Franco Scaglione's BAT lived up to its name by looking a) like the company car of some shadowy, caped superhero, and b) utterly, well, bats**t. Scaglione blended science and art to create a prototype both extraordinary and extraordinarily efficient: despite its 4cyl engine developing barely 40bhp, the original BAT was allegedly clocked at 124mph. The Batmobile was no slice of show stand vapour. It *worked*.

## 1962

THE PIONEER

### GIULIA

● HIT

Probably the most influential Alfa of them all. The delicious, Bertone designed Giulia wasn't just smartly engineered and fine to drive, it effectively invented the exec saloon class, paving the way for BMW's 3-Series and the rest. With a lightweight monocoque body, sublime aluminium twin cam engines and coil spring suspension all round, the Giulia was a genuine trailblazer: Alfa leading the charge rather than playing catch up.

Without the Giulia... today's exec saloon is anyone's guess

## 1965

### GIULIA SPRINT GTA

● HIT

The OG. The pinnacle. The (tiny, lightweight) daddy. With steel panels switched for aluminium, Plexiglas glazing and magnesium wheels, the GTA boasted a power to weight ratio of 230bhp per tonne in race trim: by 1960s standards, basically a space rocket. The GTA was sublime on track – racking up a reputed 200 victories in the 1966 season alone – and perhaps even better on the road: a fizzing, furious ball of pure joy.

## 1966

### SPIDER

● HIT

*And here's to you, Mrs Robinson...* Pininfarina's pitch perfect roadster was a hit even before its starring role in *The Graduate*. Once Dustin Hoffman got his slender hands on it, the Spider – or Duetto, as some knew it – rose to the status of bona fide pop culture legend. It would prove to be the final car designed by Battista Pininfarina himself. What a way to bow out – so immaculate were the Spider's lines, it would remain in production for nearly 30 years.

THE
COOLEST

## 1967

### 33 STRADALE

**● HIT**

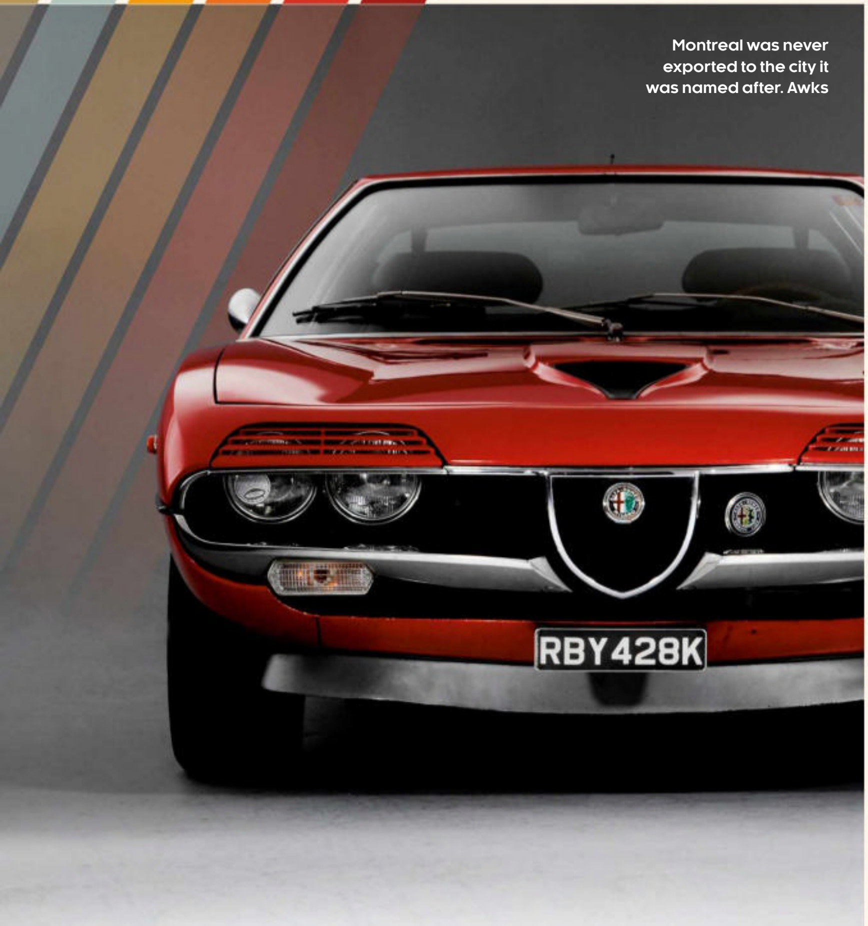
The prettiest Alfa of all time, so therefore the prettiest *car* of all time. Effectively a roadgoing version of Alfa's Tipo 33 sports racing prototype, at launch the 33 Stradale was not only the world's most expensive car, but also its fastest accelerating, the 2.0 V8 generating 230bhp in a spindle of aluminium weighing barely 700kg. Despite its groundbreaking performance, despite its butterfly doors, despite *those looks*, the 33 Stradale struggled to sell.

## 1968

### CARABO

**● HIT**

A Bertone concept based on a spare 33 Stradale chassis (told you Alfa struggled to sell them) and named after British football's least popular competition, the Carabo was Marcello Gandini's blueprint for the future of the supercar, foreshadowing the Lamborghini Countach with its outrageously wedgy profile and scissor doors: in fact, it was the first car ever to use them. Stood less than 39 inches tall, thus making the original Ford GT40 look like an SUV.



Montreal was never exported to the city it was named after. Awks

## 1970

### MONTREAL

**● HIT**

Peak early 1970s cool. The 2+2 Montreal not only looked magnificently louche, but – with a 2.6-litre V8 closely related to that of the 33 Stradale – had the soul of a supercar, and performance to match. OK, at launch it cost twice as much as a Jag E-type. And more than a 911. And pretty much the same as a Ferrari Dino. But did any of those cars have retractable headlight grilles? No, they did not. Case closed, your honour.

## 1971

### ALFASUD

**● MISS**

Alfa's first FWD offering was a technological *tour de force* of its day, upstaging Lambo's Countach prototype when it was unveiled at the Turin Auto Show. But the Alfasud was undone by politics and rust – to stimulate the economy of the country's south, the Italian government insisted it would be made in a factory just outside Naples, resulting in all the quality you'd expect from a workforce with no experience of car building but plenty of experience of going on strike.

## 1981

### GTV6

● **HIT**

The driving position was terrible. The underpinnings were pensionable. The reliability… wasn't. But the fuel injected V6 was glorious, gifting the GTV serious smarts not just on the road but around the track, too: it would go on to win the European Touring Car Championship four years on the spin. Sensible buyers went for the cheaper, more reliable Porsche 924. But where's the fun in sensible?

## 1983

### ARNA

● **MISS**

Alfa's tie-up with Nissan – a liaison that also birthed the Nissan Sunny – could have delivered Italian looks with Japanese build quality. Sadly the Arna served up exactly the opposite: utterly anonymous visuals, married to the thrilling lottery of 1980s Italian electrics. Alfa reckoned it could sell 60,000 Arnas a year, but didn't manage that number *in total* over the car's four year lifespan. That rarest of things, an entirely forgettable Alfa.

## 1985

### 75

● **MISS**

Yep, the 1980s were a bad era for Alfa. The 75 wasn't quite such a flop as the Arna – which, OK, is like being 'nicer than chlamydia' – but was still decidedly floppy. Effectively a reworked version of the old Giulietta – which itself had borrowed plenty from the even older Alfetta – the 75 was behind the times even at launch. Roof mounted switchgear, the world's oddest handbrake and mystifying lack of rear legroom see this one filed under 'WTF ergonomics'.

## 1985

### 185T

● **MISS**

Riccardo Patrese described it as 'the worst car he ever drove'. Alfa's 1985 F1 machine was so spectacularly uncompetitive that, halfway through the season and with no points scored, the team simply ditched it for the previous year's car (which also failed to score a point, but hey, always good to change things up, right?). The experience proved so traumatic it sent Alfa into a self imposed three decade exile from F1.

Patrese, seen here in rare moment not banging his hand on the steering wheel

THE MADDEST

## 1988

### 164 PROCAR

● **HIT**

We've all been there. You've spent years developing a V10 F1 engine, only to discover that it's just too heavy to stick into your Grand Prix car. So what do you do? Stick it in middle of your sensible executive saloon, of course, to create a 600bhp 217mph racing monster. History's ultimate sleeper, the 164 ProCar would never race competitively, which – given it blended F1 car power with absolutely zero downforce – was possibly for the best.

## 1989

### SZ

● **HIT**

Some will tell you 'Il Mostro' is perhaps the ugliest car ever to wear the Alfa badge. You must ignore these folk. The brutalist SZ was a thing of uncompromising beauty, its thermoplastic composite bodywork (meant to save kilos, somehow ended up weighing almost exactly the same as the 75 saloon on which it was based, because *Alfa*) looking better with every passing year. You may disagree. But you'll be wrong.

## 1993

### 155 V6 TI

● **HIT**

Peak touring car cool. For the 1993 season, Alfa rocked up at Germany's DTM championship with this satanic reworking of its 155 saloon, replete with four wheel drive, carbon fibre body and a sophisticated 2.5-litre V6 spinning to nearly 12,000rpm. Sounded great, looked great – and (perhaps most improbably) went great. The 155 crushed Merc and BMW in their own backyard to deliver the 1993 DTM title to Nicola Larini. In your face, Germany! Again!

## 1994

### GTV

● **HIT**

An extraordinary feat of packaging. Extraordinary in the sense of 'what did they do with all the cabin and luggage space?' The GTV may have been as practical as windscreen wipers on a submarine, but made sense on an emotional level (the most important of all the levels) with its combination of sparkly engines, happy handling and a pretty interior that occasionally didn't even fall apart within 20 minutes of driving off the forecourt.

## 1995

### 145 CLOVERLEAF

● **HIT**

Discerning hot hatch enthusiasts of the era bought a 306 GTi-6, but the 145 was the romantic choice. Its looks might have been slightly gopping – blame Chris Bangle – but a zippy 148bhp twin spark 2.0-litre, crisp five speed box and tidy chassis imbued the Cloverleaf a unique charm. Few survive today, those that avoided falling victim to 'roadside beech trees' instead falling victim to rust.

## 2001

### 156 GTA

**● HIT**

As we all know, front wheel drive super saloons don't *work*. Asking the same two patches of rubber to manage both propulsion *and* steering duties is a recipe for wayward handling and driving dissatisfaction. But there's always an exception that proves the rule, and the 156 GTA delivered BMW bashing performance despite its wrong wheel drive configuration. How the company managed this witchcraft, no one seems quite sure. Including Alfa.

## 2005

### SPIDER

**● MISS**

On paper, it looked great. And frankly 'on paper' was the best way to experience the Spider (and its coupe sibling, the Brera). Great on a bedroom wall poster, rather less great from behind the wheel. The Spider's chassis served up none of the excitement promised by the rock star aesthetics, while the build quality was notable only for its utter absence. You'd have been delighted if someone on your street bought one, so long as that someone wasn't you.

## 2007

### 8C COMPETIZIONE

**● HIT**

The 8C – which, under its indecently beautiful carbon fibre skin, borrowed plenty from the less scarce Maserati GranTurismo – was far from the last word in handling dynamics. Hardly a problem, as 'going for a drive in it' was frankly an unnecessarily distraction from the main pleasure of 'just standing and staring at it'. Sounded as good as it looked, which is saying something. A treat for eyes and ears.

## 2008

### MITO

**● MISS**

Aimed to stick it to BMW's Mini with irresistible Italian styling and irresistible Italian handling. Failed on pretty much every front. The MiTo looked weirdly gawky, and, with its Fiat Punto underpinnings, steered no more elegantly. Might have sold more if Alfa had a) offered it as a 5dr and b) made it less pants. And then there was the name – a portmanteau of 'Milano' and 'Torino' – which sounded like a brand of canned canine sustenance. A dog's dinner.

## 2013

### 4C

**● MISS**

So close, yet so far. The 4C's list of raw ingredients were so delicious – mid-engined, rear drive, two seats, lightweight carbon chassis – it seemed impossible that even Alfa could bugger up the bake. Somehow it managed it. The 4C drove in a fashion so disjointed, so lurchy and so twitchy, one could only conclude it was either a) broken or b) haunted by vengeful spirits. More fool us for daring to believe. As the old quote goes, it's the hope that kills you.

THE WORST

Promised much, wasn't the showstopper we were all hoping for

## 2014

### GIULIETTA QV

**● MISS**

You want to out-Golf GTI the Golf GTI, you'd better bring your A-game. With the Giulietta QV, Alfa failed to bring any game in the first half of its alphabet. Stodgy handling and an even stodgier double clutch gearbox – along with frustratingly offset pedals, frustratingly unyielding seats and… in fact frustratingly *nearly everything* – relegated the Cloverleaf Giulietta to the most tepid end of the great hot hatch league table. Came for the king, missed by a mile.

The Giulia QV delivered on all fronts. Not sure how that happened…

## 2016

### GIULIA QV

● **HIT**

Now *that's* a proper Cloverleaf. The super saloon edition of Alfa's first RWD offering in decades was an absolute honey, its 'three quarters of a Ferrari engine' V6 generously doling out ample power, noise and skids on demand. The Alfa was sharper handling… and the M3 a classier all-rounder, but who would you prefer to hang out with? A true spiritual successor to the Giulia Sprint GTA. Compliments don't come much higher.

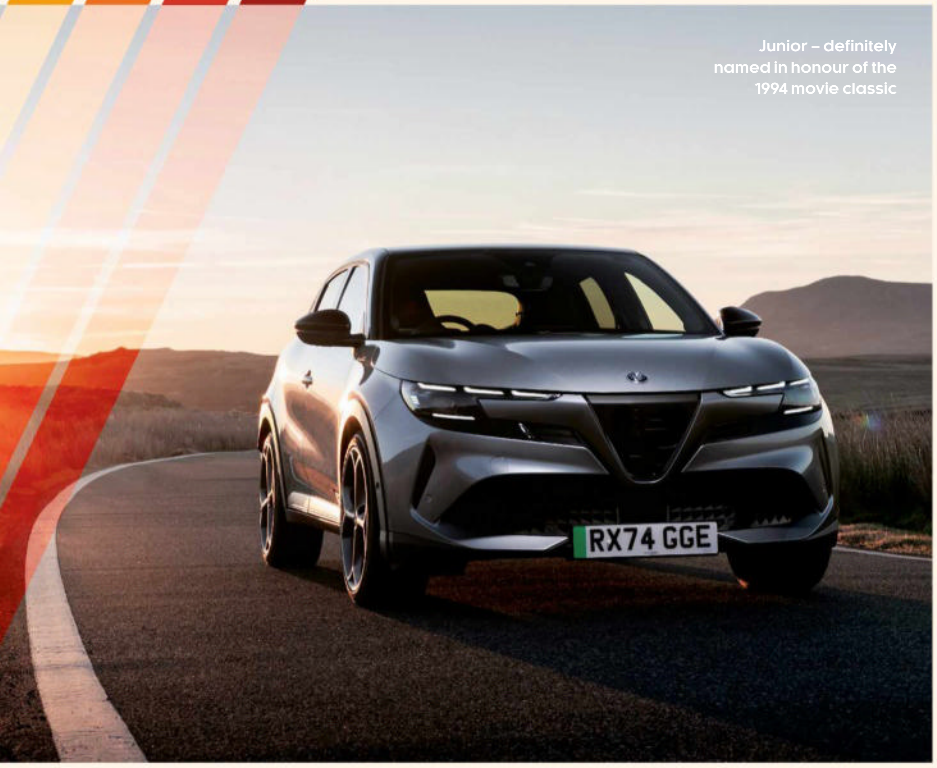
## 2017

THE BEST

### ALFAHOLICS GTA-R

● **HIT**

Is this merely an excuse to stick *another* GTA on the list? Yes, yes it is. Do we apologise for this? No, no we do not. It might hail from Bristol rather than Balocco, but Alfaholics' glorious restomod sharpens up the 1960s original to appeal to our discerning 21st century palates. Given the 3,000 hours of work that goes into each car, the GTA-R's £300k price tag doesn't sound *that* ridiculous, right? Someone? Anyone?



Junior – definitely named in honour of the 1994 movie classic

## 2024

### JUNIOR

● **MISS**

On 10 April, 2024, Alfa revealed its first EV, proudly announcing its battery powered SUV would be called the Milano. Five days later, it was rechristened the Junior. Why? The Italian government curtly reminded Alfa that only products *made* in Italy could employ such an Italian name. And the Junior – despite Alfa's claims of *passione* and *velocita* – was very much made in… Poland. A marketing fail on so very many levels.

## 2025

### 33 STRADALE

● **HIT**

So rare and absurdly expensive is Alfa's new mid-engined supercar, you could argue it's no more than an irrelevant sidenote. You might well be correct. But, at the same time, the 33 Stradale is proof that, when Alfa can avoid being entirely mad for a while, it's still capable of cooking up world class delicacies. Sure, there's plenty of Maserati under the skin, but the *nuova* 33 Stradale is also fizzy, fun, special to sit in and breathtaking to behold.

# MAKE THEM AN OFFER THEY CAN'T REFUSE

You're not a petrolhead until you've owned an Alfa. What to buy used at three budgets

**WORDS** OLLIE KEW

£
SOLDATO
£0–£2,000

## SPIDER

**PRICE: £2,000**
Nowhere near as easy to find a cheap Spider as it was when the telly show bagged a GTV, 75 *and* a classic Spider for £2,500… but armed with a £2k budget it's doable. We found one with a mere seven owners and 115k miles with £50 to spare! Watch out for oil pumps which sabotage the engine. But is there a prettier used car for £2k?

## GT

**PRICE: £1,200**
At this money, it's likely to have a 1.9-litre diesel engine which grumbles to 62mph in 9.6 seconds. Underneath it's a mishmash of 147 hatch and 156 saloon. So, twice as many cars to source spares from. Stretch the budget to £4k, and you'll get one with the legendary 3.2 litre V6.

££
CONSIGLIERE
£20k–£40k

## 4C SPIDER

**PRICE: £39,000**
The 4C was deeply flawed, no question. But with prices creeping into the £30,000s, you might have some budget to sort out the rear axle's wayward passive rear steer, the steering's catastrophic tramline hungry geometry and the droning sports exhaust. Right all of Alfa's factory wrongs, and, well, it still won't be as good as a Boxster. Special, though. And rare… with good reason.

## GIULIA 1600

**PRICE: £29,995**
The Giulia is one of the cars that built the Alfa legend: an affordable, great driving family saloon equipped with rorty engines. For less than a base modern Junior crossover, we found a rare 1 of 50 (apparently) imported South African 'Rallye' example – basically a ready made competition car with 125bhp and an LSD. Proper Italian motorsport pedigree, for less than a soulless 21st century box? What could go wrong?

£££
DON
£100,000+

## 8C COMPETIZIONE

**PRICE: £235,000**
In 2007, an 8C was £110,000. In 2025, one of the 500 coupes will set you back almost a quarter million. And yes, when you get turned away from the Alfa service centre because this GranTurismo in disguise can only be worked on at Maserati dealerships, it'll feel like you paid over the odds for the inconvenience. But just look at it. Very possibly the best looking new car of the 21st century, with a cackling V8 soundtrack. The head says buy a Maser. But the heart?

## ORIGINAL 33 STRADALE

**PRICE: £millions**
Actually, an 8C is a bargain. The original 33 Stradale was the world's most expensive car in 1968 – two million lira more than a Lamborghini Miura. But these days the prices have more digits than an Alfasud owner's rust proofing invoice. Naturally, with only 18 made, you're not exactly tripping over them down the local car auction. In fact, our top tip is to watch out for the 1930s and 1950s classics – as their admirers pass away, prices are beginning to stutter.

# ALFA SENIOR

THE BOSS

## What's next on the roller coaster that is Alfa? CEO Santo Ficili explains all

**INTERVIEW** PAUL HORELL

**BY LAW, ALFA ARTICLES START WITH AN ITALIAN** exclamation. Here goes: *mamma mia*, the petrol Quadrifoglio lives! *Bravissimo*! Etc. Until recently Alfa planned the next Giulia and Stelvio as all electric. Now, CEO Santo Ficili says that's changed. Tariff chaos and a slow in the EV transition mean that flexibility is a must. "There will be PHEV and HEV and BEV."

He goes on, "My dream is to keep alive the Quadrifoglio. We can't forget this. Quadrifoglio can be BEV, why not? But it can also be ICE." *Viva* V6.

The electric Alfas will be first, with Stelvio at the end of this year and Giulia next – main versions first then Quadrifoglio. They can have up to 800V for fast charging, big batteries for long range, and rear or twin motors.

Ficili says they are having a last minute front end redesign, so they have enough cooling intakes for petrol engines. "The design must be in line with the other models that we want to launch."

How will Alfa make cars that feel different from the rest of the sprawling Stellantis Group's? "I think the Alfa Romeo brand is Italy, is red or *rosso* in Italian, and is sport. Italian. Red. Sport. We need to find the right balance between these three. What I want for the product is Alfa Romeo only."

Design is the first element of this Alfa character, explains Ficili. "When you look at the car, you must understand immediately it is an Alfa. And the driver must have everything under control. So I'm not imagining tonnes of things around you that don't help."

"We need the right balance between suspension, steering, absorption, exhaust and engines to find the right handling of the car."

But there's a problem. Stubbornly low sales. Alfa hyped the Tonale and Junior as sales boosters because small and compact crossovers dominate today's market. But actually Alfa monthly sales are the same as five years ago, when the MiTo and Giulietta were in their death spirals.

I mention I've lost count of the number of previous Alfa bosses who said sales would double, only to see them fall. "We need to keep the customers who are in love with Alfa – and there is a long queue, because of the legacy, the racing, the glory, the product we created in the past."

OK, but why aren't the people in this queue buying your cars? And how do you build buzz for Alfa among people who don't actually know much about all that? "Junior is the right model to satisfy younger people. A bridge between new customers and the older Alfisti." He says it's doing well. Meanwhile the Tonale, which started quite strongly then tailed off, will get a deep facelift late this year.

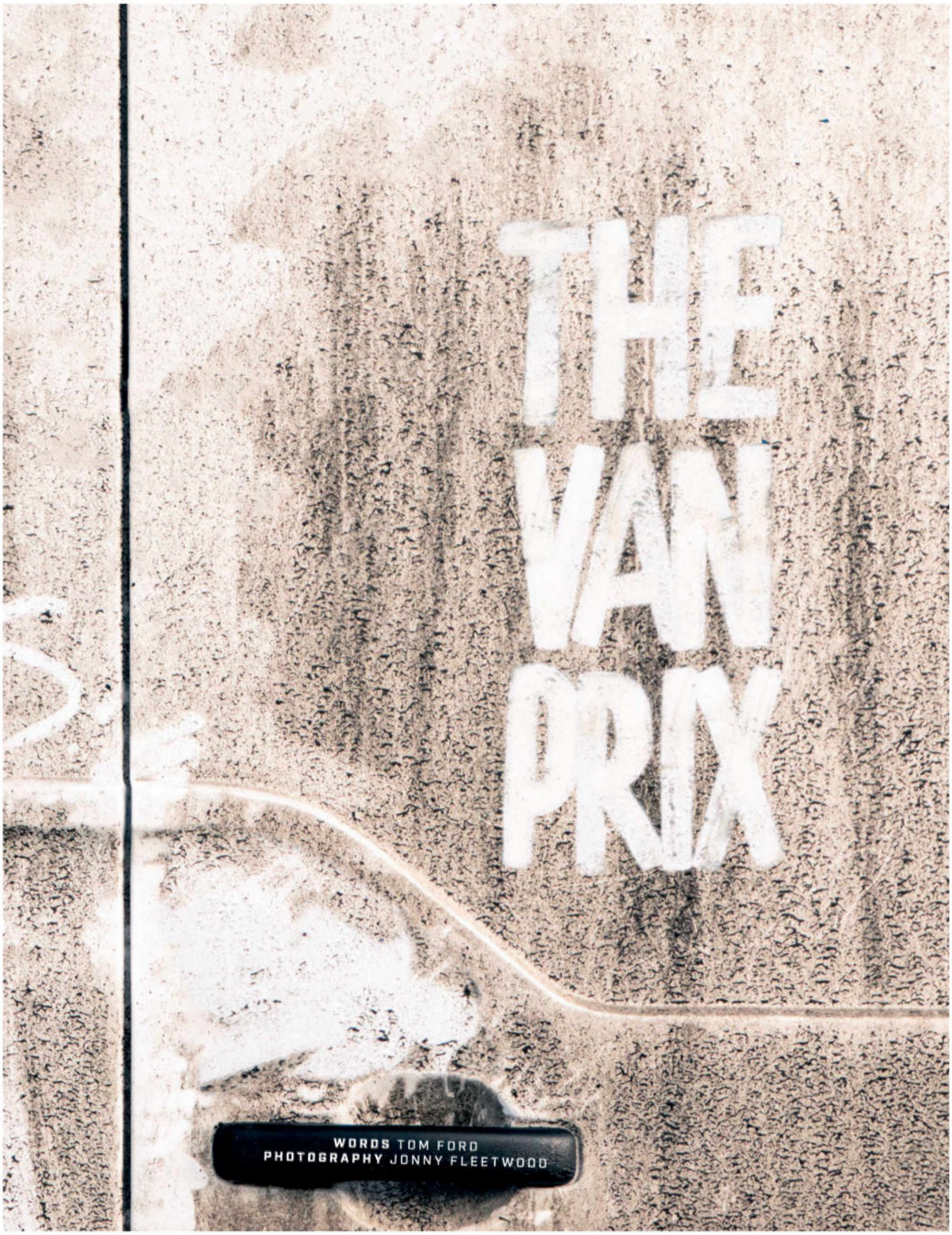
With that and the next Stelvio and Giulia, there'll be a freshness about Alfa's range that it hasn't had for many years. Even so, Alfa will always be small. "We aren't BMW." Indeed. BMW, with its much bigger range, sells 20 times as many as Alfa. But then Alfa is just a small part of the huge Stellantis Group and gets lots of synergies. The challenge is to make its cars different from the related brands.

To help keep the Alfa flame burning bright, there will be more of the high end specials like the 33 Stradale, once its two year production run is over. "If I can also search for synergies with Maserati, we can imagine for sure to make products like this. We had the 8C, 6C, 4C. It's easy. Why? Because I can look in the past of Alfa Romeo."

But it's £1.7m a copy. I mention that if Alfa is making pretty ordinary small crossovers like the Junior, it has to earn the right to its name by also having more distinct cars at a less extreme price than the 33. He says the 33 will be a design influence. "We can consider parts of this design, and move from these to the future models."

From 1950 to 2010 Alfa made so many gorgeous and relatively affordable coupes and spiders. "There is space to work in the smaller segments: coupe, spider. But this is not our priority now, because now we need the models that can deliver volume that can sustain the brand."

There's simply too much turbulence, too much uncertainty, to have the luxury of launching minority cars. "We need to consider the two years ahead that are not so clear. And then we'll see."


THE VAN PRIX

**WORDS** TOM FORD
**PHOTOGRAPHY** JONNY FLEETWOOD

**This is the most important test you'll read this month. Why? Because it's about vans. The workhorses of the UK stable, the nervous system of order fulfilment, the dieselly enabler of your online shopping habit. You, or someone you know, owns a van. In urban areas they're like rats – you're never more than 49 metres from one. And the numbers are growing. As of 2024, there were approximately 4.6 million licensed vans in Great Britain, one for every 15 people in the country, and the Ford Transit alone has over 960,000 vehicles licensed and gambolling about our road network. So yes, vans. The most important vehicles you never notice...**

BW24 WWM
KY74 TVZ
EJ24 KUK

## THE VANS

### VAUXHALL VIVARO

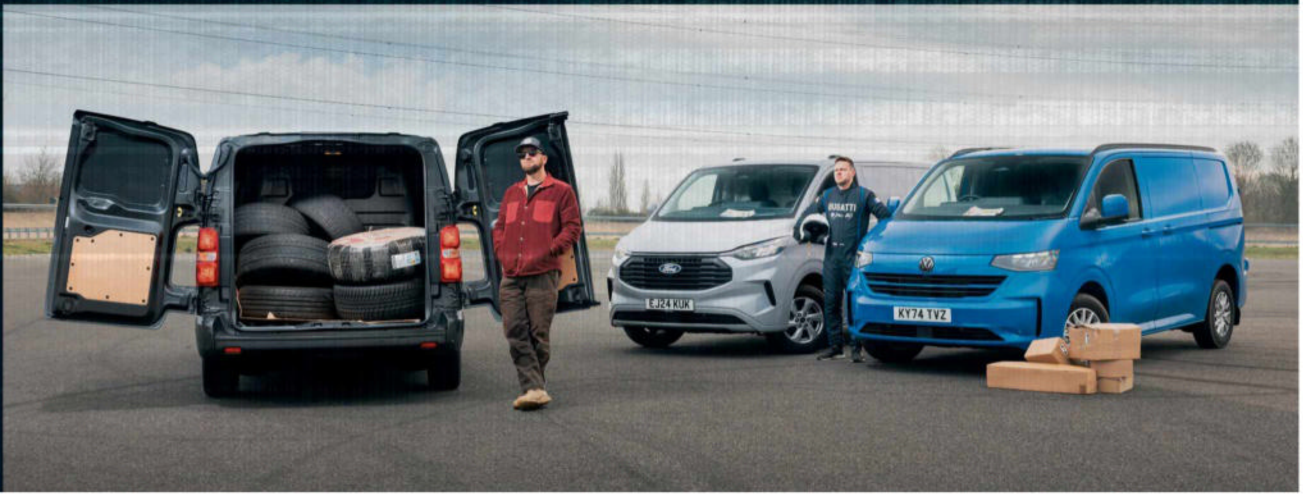
**Price:** £27,555 [ex VAT] (£33,101 as tested)
**Engine:** 2.0-litre turbodiesel, 143bhp, 251lb ft
**Performance:** 0–62mph in 14.0secs, 106mph
**Economy:** 36.7mpg, 200g/km $CO_2$
**Payload:** 1,415kg

### FORD TRANSIT

**Price:** £32,350 [ex VAT] (£41,304 as tested)
**Engine:** 2.0-litre turbodiesel, 168bhp, 288lb ft
**Performance:** 0–62mph in 13.1secs, 109mph
**Economy:** 36.2mpg, 205g/km $CO_2$
**Payload:** 1,288kg

### VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

**Price:** £30,816 [ex VAT] (£40,665 as tested)
**Engine:** 2.0-litre turbodiesel, 168bhp, 288lb ft
**Performance:** 0–62mph in 14.0secs, 109mph
**Economy:** 36.7mpg, 203g/km $CO_2$
**Payload:** 1,238kg



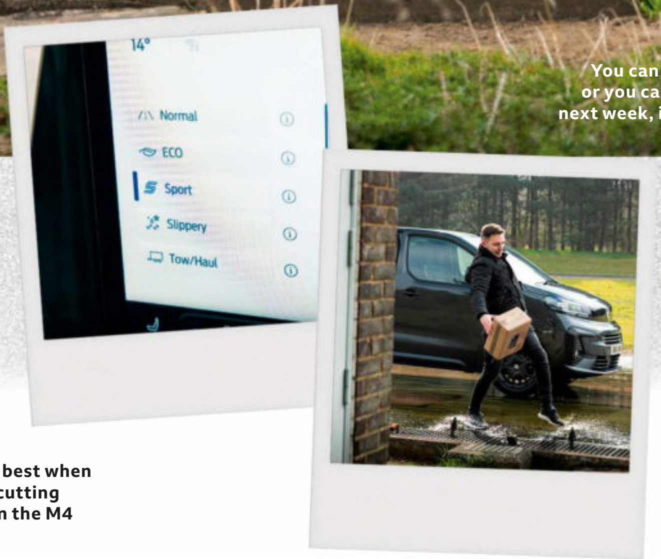
The truth is that vans support everything. From small businesses to construction to retail, to propping up the near instantaneous delivery of your sweatshop specials, vans are the key to that 'last mile' delivery puzzle. And while you might think that vans haven't changed much over the years, you'd be wrong. They're cleaner, more equipped, handle better and last longer (in some cases) than they ever did. Interestingly though, the stats show that 96 per cent of vans are still vehemently diesel powered (electric vans only account for a single per cent of the current van ecosystem), so we thought we'd take a look at three of the most popular medium sized diesel vans currently on the market to see which is the best. Now, obviously we could have used spreadsheets and science, instead preferring tactical stupidity and inaccurately applied smartphone stopwatches to determine the winner, in the grand tradition of *TopGear* professional chaos. Don't say we didn't warn you.

First we need to meet our contenders. The Transit needs little introduction, it being the most popular van – in its various forms – in the UK. The basic Transit Custom we have here is the most popular bodystyle, combining generous payload with a road footprint that stills fits in car parks and through urban width restrictors, but still with enough space to fit three people in bright orange safety wear. Which means the VW Transporter we have here isn't much of a surprise, given that it sits pretty closely to the Transit ideal. More than closely, seeing as it's the same van with a bit of badge engineering and different trim. Yep, the T7 VW Transporter is a Transit Custom. Or possibly the other way around, but they're both built at Ford's plant in Turkey on a slightly out of register photocopier. So they get the same engines, the same transmissions, the same bodies – with a bit of Vee-dub or Ford veneer thrown over the top. So they should be pretty much identical.

In the same vein, our third contender is our control subject and actually also our fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh, seeing as the

Tom is all about safety – even better if he can look like Juan Manuel Fangio at the same time

You can have it quickly or you can have it intact next week, it's your choice



Sport mode best when it comes to cutting people up on the M4

Vauxhall Vivaro is Stellantis' shared platform panel van with manufacturer specific tinsel. So the Vivaro is also the Citroen Dispatch, Peugeot Expert, Fiat Scudo and Toyota Proace with different faces. And it's a solid van. Much cheaper than the other two, with slightly less power and a manual box where the other two are eight speed autos, but it's got all the right ingredients.

So. Unsurprisingly, there are challenges. A multidrop delivery section with bonus slippery surface skidpan, timed laps on a dedicated handling circuit (both loaded and unloaded) and a comfort and usability gymkhana. None of which our two testers were briefed about, prepared for, or indeed capable of. Still, you work with what you have, and the multidrop delivery sounded pretty easy: stop on the skiddy bit, find and deliver a package, reverse around a corner, repeat.

The Transit was unsurprisingly quickest off the line in Sport mode (yes, it has carlike modes) with a grumbly flare of wheelspin, excess speed into the braking zone punished by several yards of ABS chittering overshoot. Slightly gung ho from the other Ford in the test, there. But once in position, packages can be accessed well enough from the single nearside sliding door or 90° rear doors, 'delivery' devolving into a handy lob at the nearest house. Might as well make it realistic. Standard keyless entry and push button start helps here, and there's a delivery mode that puts on the hazard lights automatically and locks the van when you step away. Handy. Still, the reversing was swift and easy thanks to rear and bird's eye cameras, the auto useful and well geared for the stop/start nightmare. A solid performance all round from the Ford with a 3:02 time.

The VW should have been very similar. But it wasn't. Noticeably more relaxed off the line – still in Sport – the VW went all McRae on the low-mu stopping section and arrived in a much more spectacular opposite lock stance than the Transit. Which looked cool, but would likely evoke stern stares if you did it on the high street. But the packages found their berths in the same way (violently), and the reversing was exactly the same as the Ford – easy and precise thanks to the camera systems. Slower overall at 3:10, but easy enough.

**Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com***

Any opportunity to whack out the Bugatti racesuit. A strict condition of his participation

Would US oval racing be any more interesting if we swapped these big lads in?

Which brings us to the Vivaro, which was… much better than expected. It's got an actual key and ignition barrel, but that didn't seem to slow it down much. And a well weighted clutch and box make it very easy to drive, with straight braking and easy reversing. Plus, the Vivaro comes with sliding doors both sides, making it much more practical when it comes to loading and access. It was slower than the other two at 3:20, but not by much – with most of that deficit attributed to Ollie Kew throwing himself inelegantly to the floor on dismount and negotiating the friction challenged delivery arena like he'd had some sort of embarrassing accident. Which just goes to show that you should always wear boots when driving a van, and not Temu Pumas.

Which brings us on to test two: handling. Conducted on a specific handling circuit, we timed and assessed all three vans both unloaded and stuffed full of wheels and tyres, with some 350kg of squeaky rubber balance of power and full send. The Transit was the fastest and most carlike with a combined time of 1:59, lifting an inside wheel unloaded like some tremendously blobby Fiesta ST, nicely reliable with a load on. The VW was calmer and more composed, but slower with a totted up time of 2:06.4, the van that changed the least with/without load. And the Vauxhall was the slowest at 2:06.3, but the one that felt much more planted with the back full of important delivery items, the origins of which no one could properly explain. It's wise to mention here that both the Transit and the VW were actually faster with added weight. Which we could put down to familiarity with the track, a more settled back axle or general incompetence.

And so to the final test: the comfort and usability melee. Which involved driving down a two mile section of cobbled road and across large speedbumps while desperately trying to use the various touchscreens and cubbies and complete various tasks like juggling, transporting a tray of drinks in glasses made of the thinnest plastic known to science, the delicate fabrication of a ham sandwich, assembling a cup of hot tea and singing the greatest hits of Whitney Houston. Unfortunately, one of the limiting factors here was the driving of the other tester, which proved to be somewhat biased. No times for this one, as it was all about the 'feel' and subjective points scoring.

Again, the Transit was solid, with reasonable damping and an interior with plenty of pockets and cubbies for packets of cheap ham. Always an important metric. The lack of physical buttons is a major bugbear when you're on the move though – everything goes through the central touchscreen and the screen logic is more complex than HMRC's phone system – and it's a little noisy, but it remained reliable in its reactions over even the biggest bumps. You can see why people like these things.

Wookie wasn't going to miss the opportunity to promote his side hustle as a kids' entertainer

CAM1
00:36:26:13
REC

CAM1
00:36:26:13

We told him it would've been easier with his eyes open, but he wouldn't listen

00:36:26:13
REC

Front brakes in the Vauxhall proved particularly strong

Apologies to the Audi owners who returned to the car park to find their cars on bricks

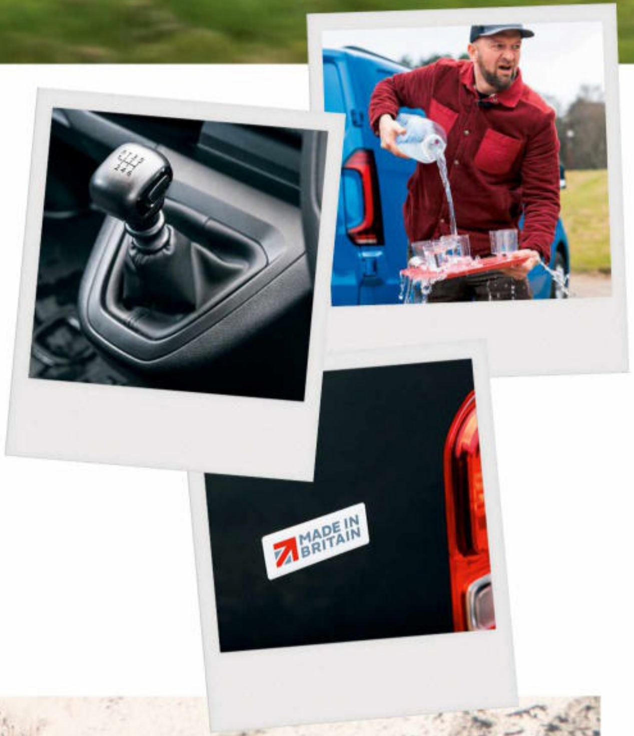
Oh no, the car in front took 0.001secs to react to the lights changing. Horn it is then

> “YOU’LL BE SLUMPED OVER THE WHEEL LIKE A MELTING CANDLE”

The Vivaro was noticeably harsher over the hump section (airborne, in some cases), noisier again on the cobbles, and suffered massively from having front seats that have all the relaxing qualities of the average wooden church pew. Which is an absolute killer if you spend all day in one. But it’s got some nice touches, like a lift up cinema style passenger seat and underseat storage in the middle for entire loaves of bread and several oranges. And actual, real time buttons and rotary dials for some functions, which make it much safer to operate on the move.

It was the Transporter that impressed the most here though. Again, it was calmer, more supple and felt weirdly more expensive than the Transit, especially on the mobile tea making front. A feeling reinforced by little things like rear wheelarch liners where the Transit has none, and extra bits of trim over the rear numberplate lights. It might not have been as fast as the Ford, but something about the VW made it feel more upmarket and more relaxing – especially on a long drive and over Belgian pavé, although again, the multimedia is perilously annoying.

Amazing – we've found the only Transit in the country without any panel damage



Which brings us to the conclusion. The Vivaro really can't be beaten for value. It's solid, practical and remarkably easy to drive, and when it's your money on the line, it competes with much more expensive vans. But we can't forgive the driving position – if you're in this thing 12 hours a day, you'll be slumped over the wheel like a melting candle. It's also just less plush than the other two for daily duties, plus you can barely hear yourself sing 'I Will Always Love You' even at full gospel volume. Which leaves the non-identical twins, and the Transit Custom and T7 Transporter are harder to pick apart. The Transit is a superbly rounded van that handles more like a car than a carryall, but do you really need that in a van? It might be handy on a track, but if you can't juggle three oranges while setting the satnav to the local Jewson, is it really that good? Which means, that if you want a van in which to transport 36 paper thin glasses of drink over speed bumps at 45mph, the VW is the one. The Transporter felt more relaxed and relaxing, and comes in a bit cheaper. So from the two, the winner would seem to be the Transit van. Except the one wearing a VW badge. But we all know the real winner here is science itself.

What goes up, must come down,

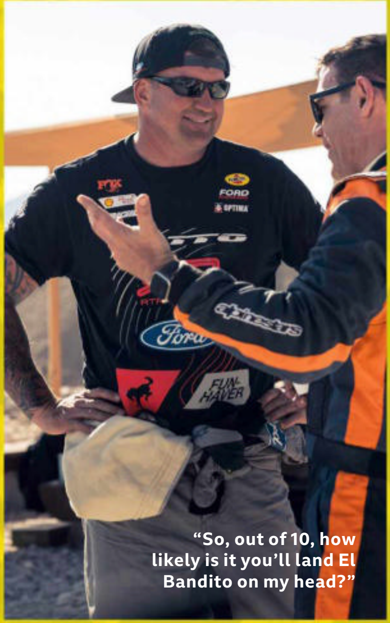
# King of the Slam

and there's no greater high than driving El Bandito…

**WORDS** JETHRO BOVINGDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK FAGELSON

# mers

# “THIS IS AN OUTLAW THAT DOESN’T CONFORM”



“So, out of 10, how likely is it you’ll land El Bandito on my head?”

We're out in the high desert, 45 minutes or so from Las Vegas. Just over the hill there's a firing range and an old graveyard for military helicopters… all around it's sand, rock, wickedly jagged terrain, patches of spiky yucca and haunting Joshua trees. Soon the area will be torn up by the deranged Ford Bronco El Bandito and its 5.2-litre supercharged V8, which could drown out a raging firefight and a whole squadron of Black Hawks. But first we have to say hi to El Bandito's handlers and start capturing the photography and video required.

"So," I begin. "Um, do you think it might be possible – and it's fine if you can't – but maybe you could…" I'm prevaricating because what I'm about to say sounds completely absurd and I've only just met this guy. "Well, this might be a bad idea. But, do you think you could jump it over my head?" There's silence for the blink of an eye before the answer comes with a grin. "Sure, we can do that. There's a spot just over there that'll work." And the tone for the day is set. Anything goes.

I guess that shouldn't come as a surprise as El Bandito is an outlaw that doesn't conform to any ruleset, but draws heavily from the worlds of Ultra4 racing and its headline King of the Hammers event, plus the gruelling, evocative and plain bonkers Baja 1000. The idea that anything is too wild for these two off road motorsport events is pretty mind blowing, but El Bandito is, I guess, the ultimate all rounder. If your commute happens to take in rocks the size of a family hatchback, sand dunes, desert washboard and frequent flight, that is.

The guy happy to leap around 2,500kg of truck over my head is Loren Healy and El Bandito is the product of his company, Fun-Haver Offroad, in conjunction with Ford. Healy has won King of the Hammers twice, is a five time Ultra4 champion and has victories on the Baja 1000, too. He's cool, laid back and incredibly enthusiastic. Later I'll find out his super relaxed persona changes to something akin to demonic possession when driving, but for now he just seems like the nicest guy on the planet. "This thing is my dream Bronco project," he says. "And – I say this all the time – it's the most fun vehicle I've ever driven. There's just something about it."

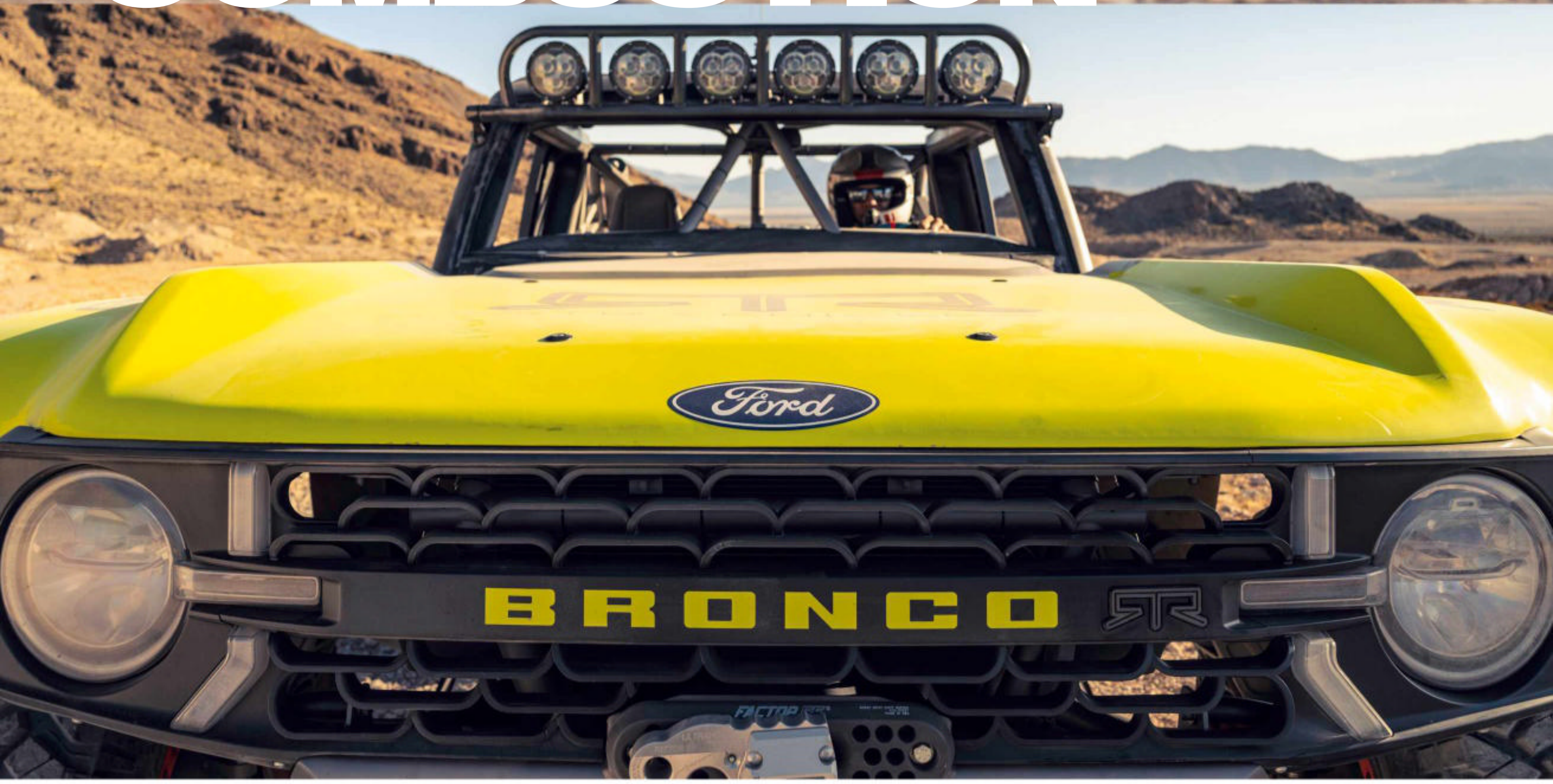
There's a lot about it. So let's try to understand what's required to hit huge boulders at 70mph and not immediately die. Loren takes up the story. "To me this is a whole mix of luxury pre-runner, an Ultra4 truck that would take on King of the Hammers, a Trophy Truck and a production Bronco." We have different ideas of luxury – the Bandito doesn't have a windscreen or windows, let alone air conditioning and massage seats – but it's really that hardware that matters.

So, the front mounted engine is the supercharged 5.2 V8 as seen in the Mustang GT500 or Raptor R but now fitted with a 3.8-litre Whipple blower and good for 1,000–1,100bhp. It drives through a 3spd TH400 transmission with manual lockout supplied by Gearworks and single speed transfer case built for monster truck applications. El Bandito is 4WD, which has become the preferred way in Baja in the last few years. Previously, mid-engined, RWD trucks were the weapon of choice.

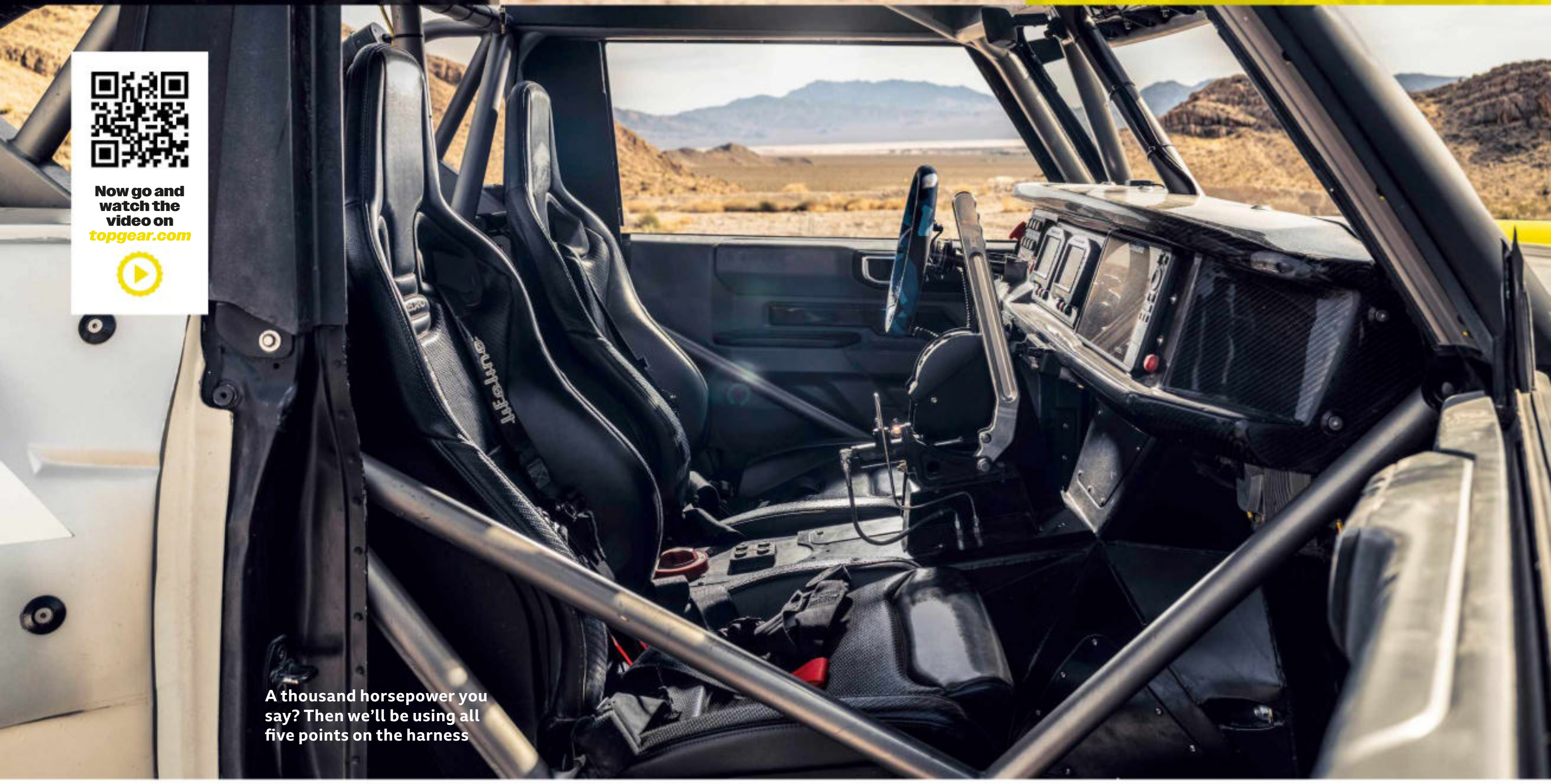
Rather amazingly, El Bandito was built up from a preproduction Bronco that had been used for durability testing. Bronco '55' was due to be crushed but Healy bought it for $1 and the project was born. What's left of 55? Not a huge amount. The doors, the dash architecture and the badges, I guess. But Ford is very serious about being 'the Porsche of off road', and many more production derived Broncos and Raptors are seeing huge success in off road events in North America. El Bandito, of course, goes one giant leap beyond.

The chassis is a bespoke all chromoly tube setup by Kibbetech Offroad Fabrication & Design, reinforced with huge bash plates similar to an Ultra4 racer to survive those rocks and massive jumps. Suspension, of course, is absolutely where the magic of these sorts of vehicles is really conjured and as well as incredibly strong Triton Engineering billet arms and uprights, El Bandito also features Fox Live Valve shocks that can adapt to the terrain in real time. The setup has 20 inches of travel at the front and 25 inches at the rear. Tyres are 42-inch Nitto Trail Grapplers running on 20-inch rims with a double beadlock system, which allows tyre pressures to run as low as 2psi without any worries about the rubber detaching from the wheel.

# "SAY A PRAYER TO THE GODS OF INTERNAL COMBUSTION"



Zero Photoshop was used in the making of this feature. No, really



**Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com***

A thousand horsepower you say? Then we'll be using all five points on the harness

"THE JUMPS GET BIGGER AND THE SPEEDS RISE"

# Bronco three ways

Ford's commitment to off road performance and capability is real. We know as much from the Ranger Raptor here in the UK, but there's so much more evidence in the US market and specifically with the Bronco

1

BEGINNER

### BRONCO BADLANDS WITH SASQUATCH PACKAGE

This is the road legal Bronco with the off road chops. The Badlands features electronic anti-roll bar disconnect for greater wheel articulation and Bilstein position sensitive dampers. The Sasquatch Package adds locking diffs to both axles and 35in tyres. There's a Bronco Raptor too, but this is the Bronco for the rock crawling the US crowd loves

2

INTERMEDIATE

### BRONCO 4600 RACE TRUCK

The 4600 is built from a stock Bronco 2dr chassis and powered by race-bred 2.7-litre EcoBoost V6 engine. It has portal axles to raise ground clearance, monster locking diffs, Fox coilover shocks with remote reservoirs and pneumatic bump stops, plus Wilwood Engineering brakes and 35in BFGoodrich tyres fitted to Method Race Wheels 202 forged beadlock wheels

3

ADVANCED

### BRONCO EL BANDITO

When normal rules don't apply you can simply take the best from Ultra4 racing and the super fast Baja 1000 to create a vehicle that does everything. It has a bespoke chassis with Triton Engineering suspension allowing huge travel (20in front, 25in rear), Fox Live Valve remote reservoir dampers, 42in Nitto Trail Grappler tyres and over 1,000bhp thanks to a Mustang GT500 5.2-litre supercharged V8. Think $1 million and you're on the right track

LOREN HEALY
67
NITTO
Ford
BRONCO
BRONCO
OFF-ROADEO

The only problem is your shopping tends to fall out the back

You swing open a door to climb into El Bandito and that's just about the last time that anything feels normal and within the usual frames of reference. The seats, funnily enough, are Recaro Sportsters, which used to be fitted to RenaultSport Clios and Meganes. They're mounted a bit higher though, and the view out is a bit different, too. There's no glass anywhere for obvious reasons and a deep upside down V shape of chromoly dissects the middle of the windscreen. The steering wheel is a small, three spoke racing item finished in a blue camo pattern that makes it feel like it should be fitted to a 1990s Vauxhall Corsa.

Turn on the ignition, fire the engine and say a prayer to the gods of internal combustion. The noise is deep, hard edged and everywhere. The gearbox clicks heavily through its crazy paved route and I immediately wonder if I'll be able to keep this thing going in the right direction while also fumbling with the heavy duty gearshift. I've never wanted paddles more. Amusingly, there's also a long levered hydraulic handbrake. Fun-Haver is a joint business venture with Vaughn Gittin Jr, so some of his drifting influence has made its way into El Bandito.

Our course, located at Ford's Bronco Off-Roadeo facility, is just about perfect. Long and varied enough to feel like we're out in the wilds, but not so vast that it's impossible to learn. Loren is my co-driver and rather than attempt to slow me down he's an advocate of what I believe our American cousins would call 'hauling ass'. Within 24 seconds of first opening the throttle (and with a huge torque converter it takes a lot of right pedal just to get going) the action takes a long pause as we sail through the air over the first of many, many jumps. It's a serene moment in an otherwise frantic, incredibly physical opening salvo of thundering V8 noise and ingesting great waves of dust and dirt. The landing is as smooth as a Bentley Flying Spur floating over a speed bump.

The way El Bandito deals with desert terrain is mind altering. Over gravel and rocks, through ruts and skimming across rapid fire bumps the ride is way more supple than, say, a BMW M4 Competition on a lap of the Nürburging. This composure breeds almost instant confidence and the sharpness of the engine is harnessed beautifully by the 4WD system. Of course you're never fully hooked up on this loose surface but El Bandito rips into the surface and finds really effective drive. It slides predictably, too. Loren warns me that if I overshoot a corner it's wise to just straighten up and give up on the apex (it's not like anything in your path is likely to stop you) to avoid any danger of rolling over, but in reality I'm just not carrying enough speed for things to get critical.

The steering is light and responsive, the balance is a little bit of understeer on the way in if you're not aggressively using the rear biased brakes or hydraulic handbrake, but once the car is turned you can light up that amazing engine and exit with a bit good twist of opposite lock and the glow of a superhero who's foiled a world ending plot.

If only I could deal with the rabid action, ever changing balance and attempting to read the terrain while also using the heavy, slightly out of sight gear selector. In the event, Loren just shifts between first and second for me, while giving hand signals to keep it pinned and laughing in encouragement. The jumps get bigger, the speeds rise and El Bandito grows in stature. What a thing. Every fantasy you've had about the Baja or King of the Hammers is wrapped up in this truck and the reality is way, way beyond your wildest dreams.

The final act of our day is a ride with Loren around the very same course. To experience El Bandito unleashed is something very special indeed. Loren's confidence is clear to see as he sets the truck up for every turn by locking the rear axle to point the nose just where he wants it. The jumps are taken flat out and a big midair blip of throttle keeps the flight path flat and true and despite getting much more height the landings are even more cushioned. Incredibly, this is all done one handed as he rests his right palm on the gear selector to manipulate that mighty, artillery spec supercharged V8. Not an ounce of performance is left on the table. When it's over I walk away in mild disbelief and wearing a very big grin. I hear Loren talking to the crew. "Yep, that was full qualifying pace," he says.

It's an unforgettable few minutes. This remarkable truck floats, slides and soars with a poise that's completely at odds with the tough, inhospitable landscape. The suspension is some sort of black magic. Yet despite the infinitely adjustable balance that has a fluid, almost delicate feel such is the responsivenes – the soundtrack, heat and exposure to all manner of torn up sand, dust and gravel make for an overwhelming, exhausting assault on mind and body.

For Loren and others who compete in events like the Baja or King of the Hammers we're not even on the nursery slopes of off road racing. As the truck comes to a rest and the fierce V8 shuts off to leave a profound silence, I ask Loren how long each stint would be in the Baja. "My longest ever was 18 hours. That was rough." I make him repeat it. Maybe twice. Driving like this, through much tougher terrain with no 'play by play' pace notes and – this bit is staggering – in the dark, seems like it should probably be illegal. "Oh, it's the Wild West down there," he says with a wide smile. The Ford Bronco El Bandito might not ever race Baja, but its spirit seems to perfectly encapsulate the sheer madness that Loren and his colleagues, rivals and friends just call life. I adore it.

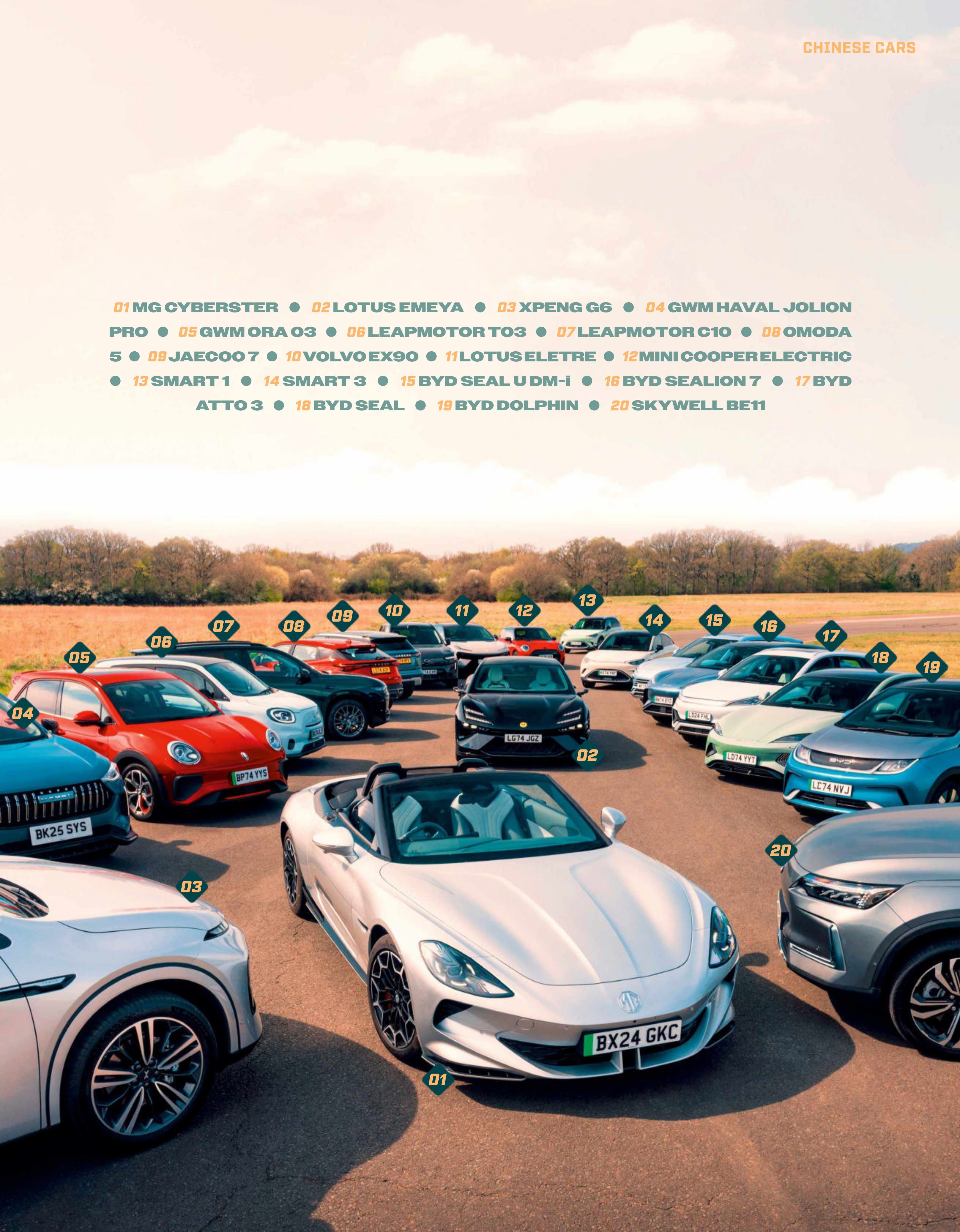
"To be clear, you want me to point it at that rocky bit and gun it?"

**WORDS**
OLLIE MARRIAGE
**PHOTOGRAPHY**
JONNY FLEETWOOD

# THE GREAT HAUL of CHINA

The cars are improving, but is China truly destined to take over British roads? *TopGear* presents the most in-depth investigation into Chinese cars ever...

01 MG CYBERSTER ● 02 LOTUS EMEYA ● 03 XPENG G6 ● 04 GWM HAVAL JOLION PRO ● 05 GWM ORA 03 ● 06 LEAPMOTOR T03 ● 07 LEAPMOTOR C10 ● 08 OMODA 5 ● 09 JAECOO 7 ● 10 VOLVO EX90 ● 11 LOTUS ELETRE ● 12 MINI COOPER ELECTRIC ● 13 SMART 1 ● 14 SMART 3 ● 15 BYD SEAL U DM-i ● 16 BYD SEALION 7 ● 17 BYD ATTO 3 ● 18 BYD SEAL ● 19 BYD DOLPHIN ● 20 SKYWELL BE11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BK25 SYS
BP74 YYS
LG74 JGZ
LD74 YYT
LC74 NVJ
LD24 FHL
BX24 GKC

**01** Exasperation or bafflement? Ah, it's both of course – this is the Haval after all **02** Start spotting new logos now. They'll be a staple of pub quizzes next year. This one's Leapmotor BTW **03** If Lambo made a saloon. Lotus Emeya 900 ain't half bad. Provided the idea of a 2.5 tonne Lotus EV doesn't bring you out in hives **04** Just in case the driver behind isn't sure which way the orange flashy thing is pointing **05** Your company car park this time next year. Lotus and Volvo sandwiching an Omoda, Leapmotor and BYD

Every Chinese car on sale in the UK right now. As in today. Tomorrow there will be more. Three years ago Chinese built cars accounted for just three per cent of European sales, now it's 20 per cent.

But first, a point of order – that opening statement needed an asterisk. Of an eight model range, we only have a single MG here. Why? Well initially MG refused to lend us cars for this story, insisting it was a British firm. The definition is interesting. After all, where do you draw the line? Volvo is owned by Chinese giant Geely, electric Minis are built not in Cowley, but Zhangjiagang. Does that make them Chinese? And what about Lotus? Owned by and built in China for a global audience wanting e-SUVs.

What of MG then? The British elements are a London design studio, a small engineering team still at Longbridge and the name. The rest is Chinese. Now, do you care about where your car comes from, who owns it? Obviously MG believes you do or it wouldn't have had an issue with lending us cars. But do you? Probably only because of scare stories you've read about your car being able to spy on you.

We can't fully debunk that, only point out that every firm we spoke to is signed up to GDPR data privacy regulations. But China is more opaque to us than say Korea or Japan, and some of its biggest automotive firms (among them MG's parent SAIC) are state owned. Got an issue with that? Fair enough, shop elsewhere.

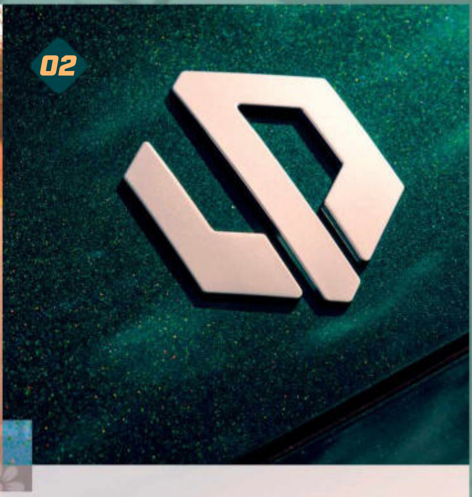
But are the cars any good? That's what we're going to find out. Once we've identified them. Mostly these badges are unknown to us, so what's the hierarchy when there's no brand equity? Who's the BMW here, the Renault, the Bentley, the Toyota?

Design is the communicator and the MG Cyberster is our standout. Credit where it's due, MG was built on two seater soft tops, so green-lighting only the second fully electric one ever to exist (after the Lotus offcut Tesla Roadster) gives it a certain status. The Brit led styling team dreamt up a classically pretty shape, it's tasteful and slick, but there are issues. European Cybersters are fobbed off with a diluted, graphically neutered version of its home market's fancy screens, so the all important tech experience is pants. It also has the damping sophistication of a waterbed tumbling down a spiral staircase, so the 310bhp RWD Trophy version is too quick for comfort, let alone the twin motor 500bhp GT model.

Modern MG is the brand others want to emulate though. It's been selling cars here since 2011 and last year shifted more metal than Vauxhall, Skoda or Peugeot. The rest of the range is pretty lacklustre, but the MG4 is a standout hatch and would have done well here. If there's a company likely to threaten MG's chart topping position, it's BYD. It's already the world's largest manufacturer of electric vehicles (outselling Tesla) and in the space of not much more than a year now has a five strong model range in the UK. The Atto 3 and Dolphin were first to arrive and are the last to get excited about.

They come across as a generation behind the other BYDs even though they're only a year or two older. The Dolphin hatch is supermini sized but at £26k is priced in line with the MG4, which it is inferior to in every way, not least its ability to demonstrate several disconnected handling traits in the same corner. The Atto 3 meanwhile made an ill advised step into a themed interior with guitar string door pockets and 1950s jukebox air vents. It's the right size for Qashqai families wanting

MG CYBERSTER


02

03

04

05

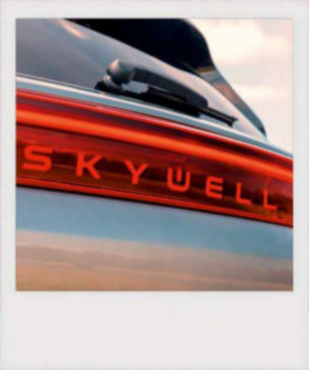
BYD SEAL U DM-i

**LOTUS EMEYA**

KV74 YKF
OE74 EVR

**BYD SEAL**

**OMODA 5**



to switch to an EV, with a 440 litre boot and 60kWh battery (for 260 miles of range). However, the plastics are cheap, the design seems to riff on a 15 year old Mitsubishi and the driving experience defines disinterested. The whole car is a little off key.

And don't go rubbing your hands thinking you're going to get a bargain, either. The Atto 3 is £37,140 and residuals are crummy because BYD has yet to establish a reputation and instil consumer confidence. The same applies to many of these cars and brands. I suspect the Atto is just something BYD has thrown at us to see what sticks. Hopefully it'll slide down the wall and into oblivion.

The Seal, Sealion 7 and Seal U are much more convincing. The latter chiefly because it's both bigger and cheaper than the Atto 3. It's a £33k PHEV, a 1.5-litre engine combining with either an 18.3 or 26.6kWh battery that can use the petrol as a range extender or to drive the wheels directly. It's sloshingly comfortable and surprisingly plush inside, with a drive that rewards a slower pace.

The Seal saloon and Sealion 7 SUV share the same 400V architecture, but in China they get an Evo version with 800V for faster charging. Not the first nor last time it'll seem like the Chinese are keeping the best stuff to themselves. The target for both is clearly Tesla Model 3/Y. Both are aerodynamic and refined, with double laminated glass working alongside the silent powertrain to provide low noise levels. Until the inevitable active safety systems bong into life, of course. A slightly scruffy ride means the Seal falls short of delivering a proper luxurious waft about the place, while the taller Sealion 7 SUV is, as you might expect from the name, a little more blubbery to drive. There's a deceptive amount of goodness for under £45k, plus a six year warranty, but could you bring yourself to spend that on a brand you hadn't heard of last week whose products are as slippery to grasp as their namesakes?

This is the issue here. A decade or more back many Chinese firms were building knockoffs of European cars such as the Evoque. Now they're designing their own cars and they're neat, but bland, forgettable. Hyundai went through this stage, of course, and is now firmly out the other side. But Hyundai needed to respond to global

“THE CHINESE MARKET IS THE WORLD’S LARGEST, THERE’S LESS INCENTIVE TO ADJUST FOR US”

tastes because its Korean domestic market is small. The Chinese market is the world’s largest, so there’s less incentive for BYD et al to adjust for us.

Let’s look at the ones that have: Lotus, Smart and Volvo. There’s a sliding scale here. Volvo is doing what it’s always done, but now with background Chinese support. Lotus has been entirely repositioned, no longer a lightweight sports car company, now a luxury sports brand aiming to rival Porsche, and Smart is now a joint project between Mercedes and Geely, so the 1 and 3 (we reject the appalling hashtags) use Zeekr underpinnings also shared with the Volvo EX30. It’s all rather confusing.

All three feel European. Yes, the Emeya lacks the last bit of chassis polish, the Smart’s blobby design is an acquired taste and Volvo’s insistence on burying everything in the central touchscreen is infuriating for a company that makes such a song and dance about safety. They’re good cars though. No Lotus has ever been as well made as the Emeya, the EX90 is the pinnacle of Volvo’s family focus and the Smarts are creative, bold, well packaged and attractively priced. OK, the lower roofed 3 is a car of indeterminate purpose, but you just know the words ‘urban style’ are featured somewhere in the literature.

They’re all recommendable. But some really aren’t. With that in mind let’s have a look at the Omoda 5, Skywell BE11 and GWM Haval Jolion Pro. They’re crossovers, but that’s no surprise because so is everything else right now. What we have here are cars that bunked off their development programmes. The £25,915 Omoda’s engine and gearbox (you were expecting electricity? That’ll be along shortly with the £33k Omoda E5) aren’t on speaking terms, the Skywell’s suspension is so easily overwhelmed occupants resemble one of those novelty bobbleheads and we remain utterly mystified by how the Haval manages to combine so little performance with so much noise.

Redeeming features are actually quite tricky to find. The Omoda has a seven year warranty and five star Euro NCAP score, but you’ll likely use both given the way it drives. Ever get the feeling no one’s actually done any chassis development? That all they’ve done is get

Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

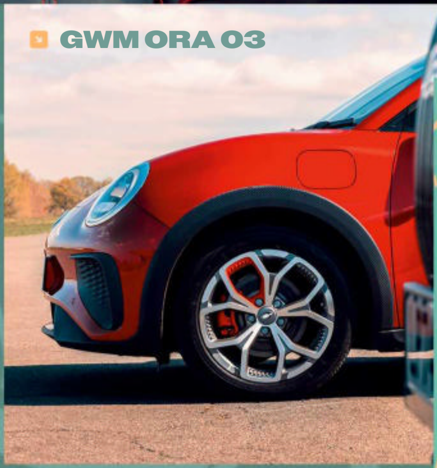
Might be called Xopera, can't promise it'll make your karaoke sound like Pavarotti

**XPENG G6**

What, no 22in screen? Hope the Ora 03 comes with a magnifying glass as standard

> “THERE'S DIVERSITY IN THE PRODUCTS AND BRANDS, BUT AS YET LITTLE CHARACTER”

**GWM ORA 03**



**LEAPMOTOR T03**

the electronic safety systems to work, established it won't flip over no matter how ham fisted and panicky the driver, and booted it out the door? Yeah, that. The Haval's packaging is bizarre, the boot tiny, the wheels buried so deep in the arches it's as if they've gone off to hibernate. Skywell? That's a marriage between the Golden Dragon Bus Company and electronics firm Skyworth, only it got the wrong one to do the infotainment.

You're thinking they'll be cheap, but they're not. And here's the thing about the Chinese cars. They're not coming in with Dacia busting price tags. At best they're just a couple of grand cheaper than their equivalent mainstream rivals, and watch the lease costs because residuals aren't likely to be pretty. And it's not like the prices are affected by import duties because the UK – unlike the EU – doesn't currently penalise Chinese marques.

The Leapmotor T03 is the exception to the above. It does have a Dacia busting price tag – just £15,995 for 94bhp and a 165 mile range. Like Smart it's a partnership deal, this time with Stellantis, that sees the T03 built on the old Fiat 500 line in Poland. And it's... OK. Apart from the way it looks. You forgive a lot for a price tag that low. Until you remember you could buy something secondhand.

The other Leapmotor, the C10, has zero in common with its sibling, but a lot with the Xpeng (pronounced *chow-pung*) G6. Both are aimed directly at Tesla. They're not alone, but they're the most shameless. Check out the C10's cabin, which appears to have been stolen wholesale down to the exact shade of grey and material textures. It's uncanny. You don't even have to stray inside the Xpeng. The high roof profile is so similar to the Model Y's that it's somewhat straining copyright laws. Both are sub-£40k with unwrinkled, featureless lines and flush fit doorhandles. The C10's a lollopy pudding, the G6 more tempting. It's our favourite Chinese newcomer, the best car this side of the Euro influenced machines.

Jaecoo, Omoda's luxury wing in the Chery universe (it's easier to plot the family tree in a rabbit warren), claims to compete at that level but cars that sell chiefly on badge need that intangible, impossible to bottle 'want one' factor. Not a failed team name off *The Apprentice* and an XXL touchscreen. And there's no parking brake switch. Aren't they compulsory?

The car formerly known as Funky Cat has lost its single USP. It's now the Ora 03. Built by GWM, it actually has a fair amount in common with the electric Mini thanks to a joint venture with BMW, but drive both back to back and you'll soon discover that's a little like Danny Dyer's relation to King Edward III. Priced from £24,995, it's neither that cheap or cheerful when you consider it against cars such as the Renault 5 or Fiat Grande Panda.

So this is where we are now. A handful of new firms have arrived bearing cars of mixed quality. Some are passable, other risible. It won't be that way for long. If one thing has taken European marques by surprise, it's the astonishing rate of development the Chinese brands are capable of – some designers we've spoken to reckon they can go from sketch to production in 18 months or less. In Europe it's four to six years. Competition is at the core. The Chinese state funded firms to get them off the ground, then let them fight it out. The failure rate has been savage. Three years ago it's thought there were 652 car firms in China – today, through collapse, takeover and merger, they're down to 150. UK buyers currently have a choice of about 57 brands.

Getting them all together proved there's diversity in the products and brands, but as yet little character. That's what we love and where we differ. China has no historic car culture, it instead celebrates and promotes technology and autonomous driving – whether it can or even wants to adapt to create cars to interest us remains to be seen. But we, the people who love cars, are a minority and despite tariffs Europe's mainstream marques look vulnerable to a product onslaught. It's coming fast.

| CAR | SCORE | PRICE FROM | POWERTRAIN |
|---|---|---|---|
| BYD DOLPHIN | 5 | £26,205 | EV, 44/60kWh, 173/201bhp |
| BYD ATTO 3 | 4 | £37,705 | EV, 60kWh, 201bhp |
| BYD SEAL | 6 | £45,705 | EV, 82kWh, 308/523bhp |
| BYD SEAL U DM-i | 6 | £33,315 | PHEV 1.5 /1.5T, 18/27kWh, 215/319bhp |
| BYD SEALION 7 | 6 | £47,000 | EV, 91kWh, 308/523bhp |
| GWM ORA 03 | 4 | £24,995 | EV, 45kWh, 169bhp |
| GWM HAVAL JOLION PRO | 3 | £23,995 | HEV 1.5T, 1.6kWh, 188bhp |
| JAECOO 7 | 5 | £30,115 | PHEV, 1.6T, 18kWh, 201bhp |
| LEAPMOTOR T03 | 6 | £15,995 | EV, 36kWh, 94bhp |
| LEAPMOTOR C10 | 5 | £36,500 | EV, 70kWh, 215bhp |
| LOTUS EMEYA | 7 | £84,990 | EV, 99kWh, 603/905bhp |
| MG CYBERSTER | 6 | £54,995 | EV, 74kWh, 335/503bhp |
| OMODA 5 | 4 | £25,915 | HEV, 1.6T, 183bhp |
| SKYWELL BE11 | 3 | £36,995 | EV, 72/86kWh, 201bhp |
| SMART 1 | 7 | £29,960 | EV, 47/62kWh, 268/422bhp |
| SMART 3 | 6 | £33,260 | EV, 47/62kWh, 268/422bhp |
| XPENG G6 | 7 | £39,990 | EV, 66/87kWh, 255/282bhp |

# THE WEAKEST LINK

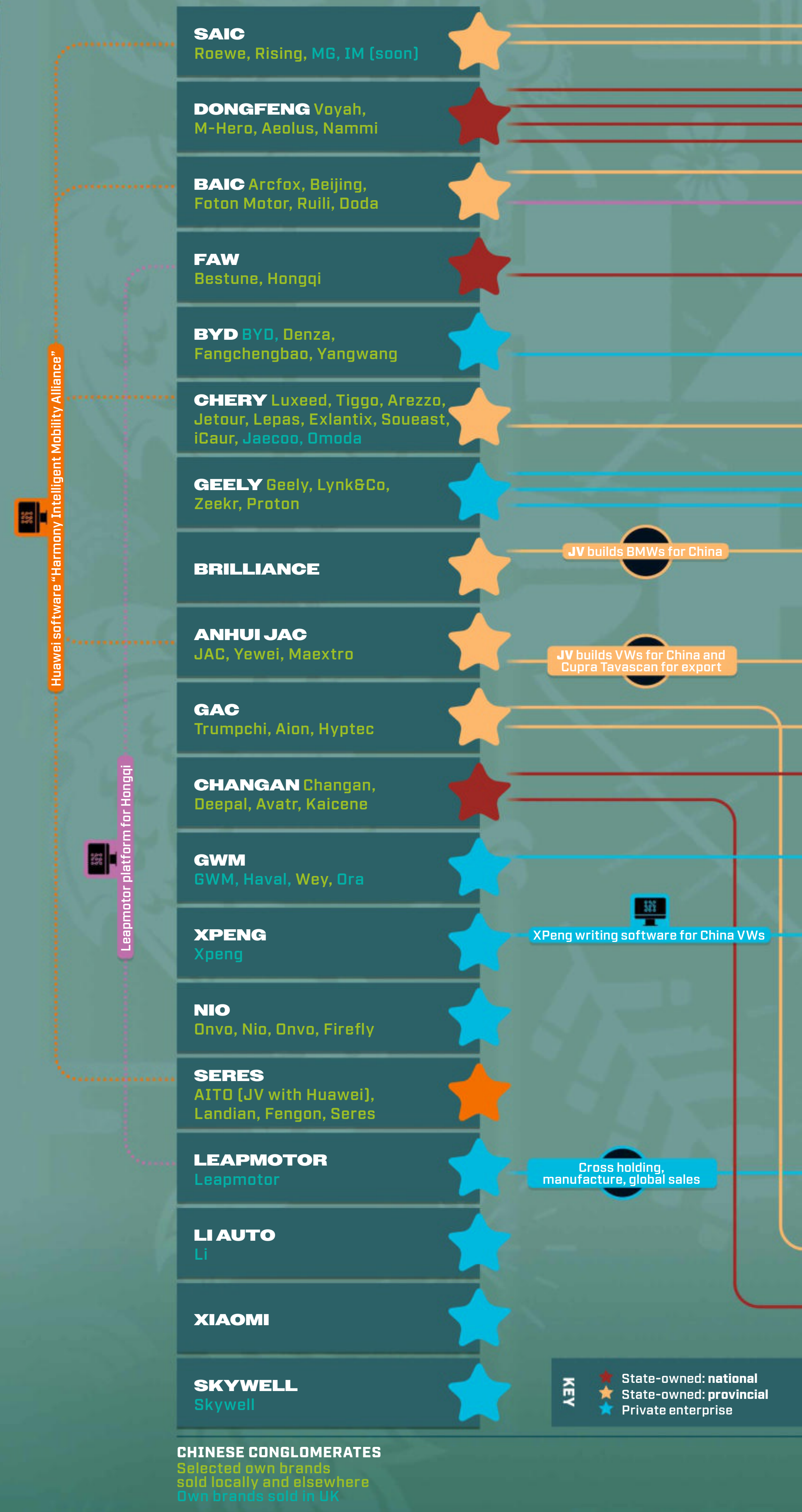
## Confused by all these Chinese brands and how they fit together? Let us *try* to explain

**WORDS** PAUL HORRELL

China's car output is now bigger than Europe's and North America's *combined*. Small wonder the Chinese have lots of companies and brands. The cat's cradle you see here is a gross simplification.

Before 1980, few private cars existed there. Then the state – national and provincial – built factories jointly owned with foreign carmakers, making the foreigners' designs. Truly local cars appeared only gradually.

This century, demand has exploded, with roads to match. Between 2000 and 2012, China built more highway length than the entire US Interstate system. The government has used EVs and PHEVs to encourage local brands to overtake the old foreigners. Life for them is getting harder now.



**SAIC** Roewe, Rising, MG, IM (soon)

**DONGFENG** Voyah, M-Hero, Aeolus, Nammi

**BAIC** Arcfox, Beijing, Foton Motor, Ruili, Doda

**FAW** Bestune, Hongqi

**BYD** BYD, Denza, Fangchengbao, Yangwang

**CHERY** Luxeed, Tiggo, Arezzo, Jetour, Lepas, Exlantix, Soueast, iCaur, Jaecoo, Omoda

**GEELY** Geely, Lynk&Co, Zeekr, Proton

**BRILLIANCE**

**ANHUI JAC** JAC, Yewei, Maextro

**GAC** Trumpchi, Aion, Hyptec

**CHANGAN** Changan, Deepal, Avatr, Kaicene

**GWM** GWM, Haval, Wey, Ora

**XPENG** Xpeng

**NIO** Onvo, Nio, Onvo, Firefly

**SERES** AITO (JV with Huawei), Landian, Fengon, Seres

**LEAPMOTOR** Leapmotor

**LI AUTO** Li

**XIAOMI**

**SKYWELL** Skywell

Huawei software "Harmony Intelligent Mobility Alliance"

Leapmotor platform for Hongqi

JV builds BMWs for China

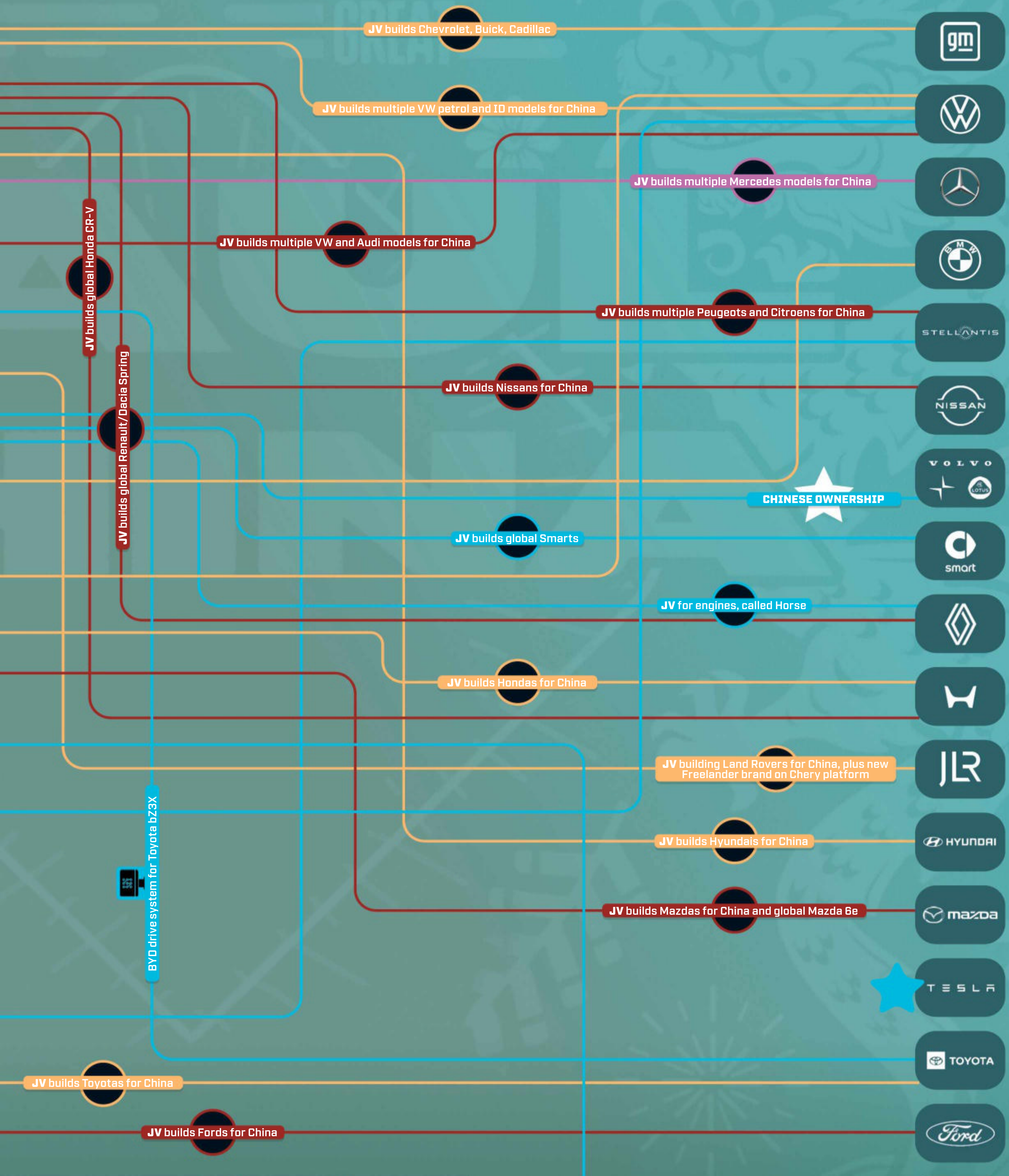
JV builds VWs for China and Cupra Tavascan for export

XPeng writing software for China VWs

Cross holding, manufacture, global sales

KEY
★ State-owned: **national**
★ State-owned: **provincial**
★ Private enterprise

**CHINESE CONGLOMERATES**
Selected own brands sold locally and elsewhere
Own brands sold in UK



JV builds Chevrolet, Buick, Cadillac

JV builds multiple VW petrol and ID models for China

JV builds multiple Mercedes models for China

JV builds multiple VW and Audi models for China

JV builds global Honda CR-V

JV builds multiple Peugeots and Citroens for China

JV builds Nissans for China

JV builds global Renault/Dacia Spring

CHINESE OWNERSHIP

JV builds global Smarts

JV for engines, called Horse

JV builds Hondas for China

JV building Land Rovers for China, plus new Freelander brand on Chery platform

BYD drive system for Toyota bZ3X

JV builds Hyundais for China

JV builds Mazdas for China and global Mazda 6e

JV builds Toyotas for China

JV builds Fords for China

JV called Spotlight builds global Mini EVs

★ Mixed entities

● Factories

Tech transfer

★ Chinese ownership (eg Geely)

**JV** = joint venture between companies

**WESTERN/
JAPANESE/
KOREAN
COMPANIES**

# TOMASO

Did you presume De Tomaso's revival was more wannabe Pagani vapourware?

WORDS OLLIE KEW PHOTOGRAPHY MARK RICCIONI

# CATCH-UP

Amazingly, it's finished. Allow us, and the dreamers behind it, to bring you up to speed…

# IN

In the realm of Very Fast Cars, things happen s-l-o-w-l-y. Last month, *TopGear* brought you a world exclusive Lotus Evija test drive. Revealed in 2019, the world's most powerful road car wasn't ready for either of its customers until mid-2025. If that strikes you as running later than a Northern rail service, what about the Aston Martin Valkyrie? The V12 F1 moonshot finally starred at *TG*'s 2024 Speed Week *eight years* (and two CEOs) after it was announced. And those are the cars that scramble out of the primordial ooze of a wishful rendering into carbon clad reality. If you slapped a deposit down on an Arash AF10 (2016), Dendrobium D-1 (2017) or heaven forbid the second gen Tesla Roadster (2017) your investment's about as safe as $hawktuah coin.

So despite a knockout reaction back in the pre-saucepan bashing times of 2019, you probably didn't expect to hear from the De Tomaso P72 again. When the rouge beauty was unveiled at that summer's Goodwood Festival of Speed, the company didn't have a factory or a confirmed engine supplier. Classic vapourware.

Plus the curse of badge baggage: De Tomaso peaked in the 1970s, floundered in the 2000s and was bought out by Hong Kong financier Norman Choi (right) in 2014. Have a canter through the leagues of defunct sports car marques that new money's gamely failed to resurrect. Brabham. Bristol. Delage, Marcos, Veritas, TVR. Even before COVID-19 or tariffs hit, the P72's survival chances were lower than a plucky promoted Premier League side's.

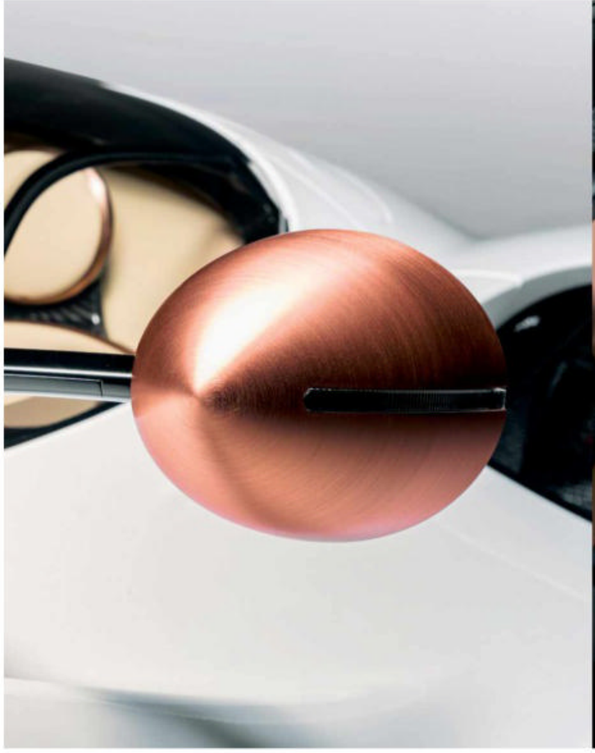
But knock me over with a peacock feather, it's complete. First deliveries in time for Christmas to 72 very patient owners. Well, 71 originals – an elderly American deposit holder actually died waiting – but De Tomaso's backers weren't worried. Its waiting list outstrips the number it'll build 20-fold.

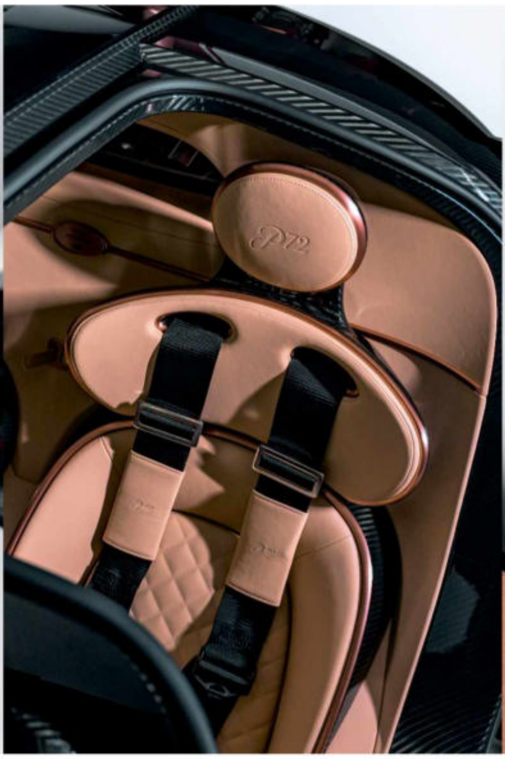
I'm meeting the company boss and his labour of love in a nondescript studio on the fringes of Stuttgart. Customers are inbound for a 'ta-dah, thanks for holding' anticipation builder as they sift through swatches. Days after I'm allowed to sit inside (on a chamois leather so my jeans don't discolour the virgin seats) it's shipped stateside to meet more clients. Seeing is believing.

Let's canter through the spec and we'll alight on what's changed since 2019. The carbon bodywork originally sketched by ex-McLaren talent Jowyn Wong has survived intact. Thank God for that, it's a stunning shape that owes nothing to generating downforce. Instead it appears to be made of windswept silk then frozen with liquid nitrogen. The only visual change is a less angular diffuser, concealing twin transmission chilling radiators.

DE TOMASO
P72

> “IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MADE OF WINDSWEPT SILK THEN FROZEN WITH LIQUID NITROGEN”

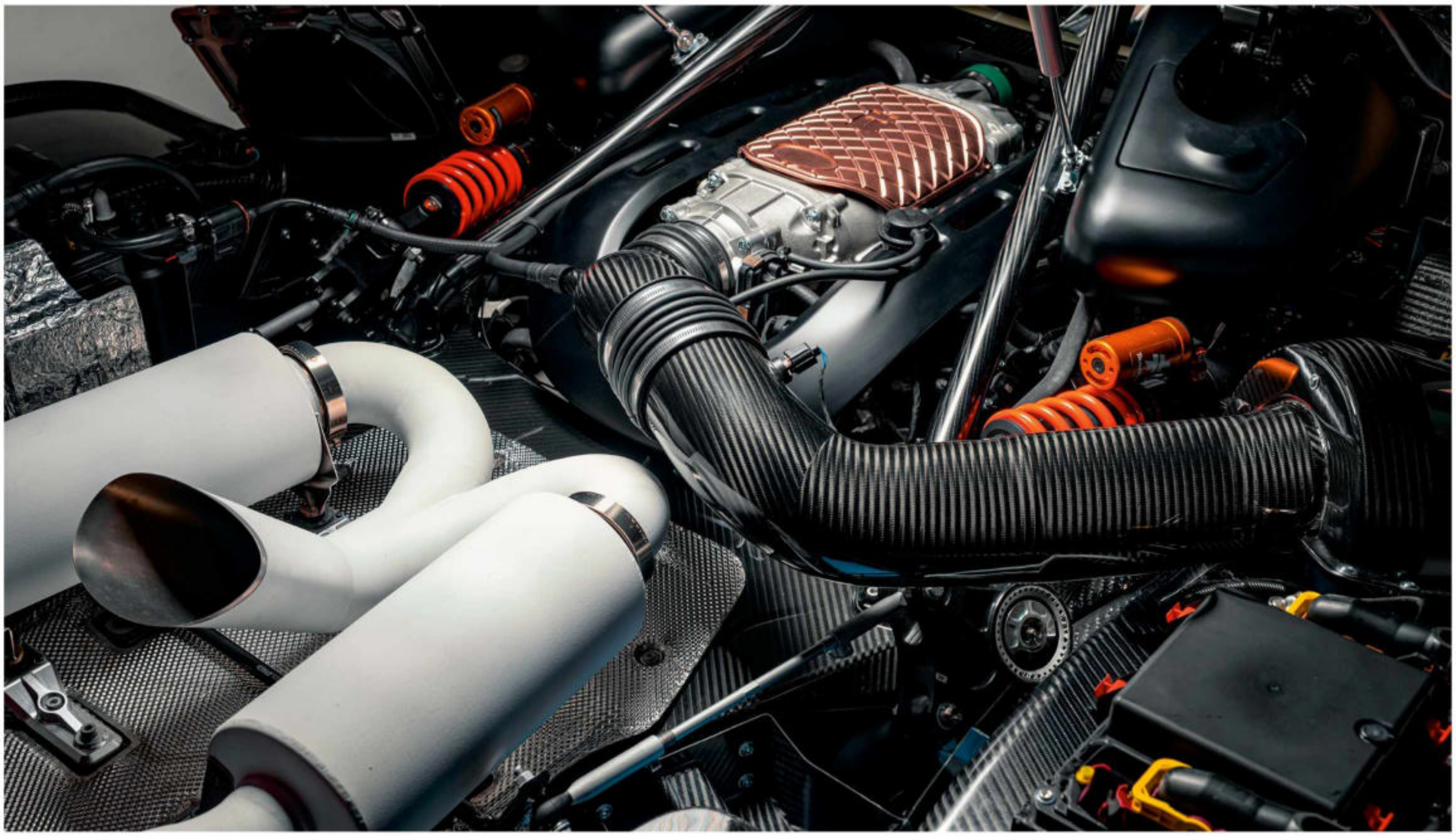




**Ever wanted unscrewing a washer fluid cap to feel like safecracking? What do you mean 'no'?**

> “THE P72 CONTINUES THE LATEST TREND IN BOUTIQUE SUPERCARS – A MANUAL GEARBOX”

Look after the pennies and… they’ll be melted down for P72 wheels, apparently



# “BY TODAY’S STANDARDS ITS 700BHP OUTPUT IS QUAINT”

Those voluptuous haunches and bubble canopy are rich in nods to the Ferrari P3/4 and Lola T70 MkIII with just a dash of original Porsche 917K. De Tomaso only notes the one off P70 prototype racer as the real inspiration for the shape. Not so sure about that – the P70 had a fixed rear wing and faired wheels – and was destined to only race once, as project chief Carroll Shelby was poached by Ford in 1965 to mastermind something called the GT40.

Power, ironically, comes from Ford. Just like the Pantera and Mangusta of De Tomaso's heyday, the P72 is thrust along by a big American V8: the 5.0-litre Coyote rumbler usually found in a Mustang. Humble beginnings, but that's deliberate. Choi says he wanted to continue the company's lineage of Detroit firepower, and create a 'timepiece' – an heirloom passed down through generations. Something easier to service than a hybrid boost quint turbo V17.

In truth it's still fairly specialised for tomorrow's 'have a go' mechanics. Pistons are forged, so's the crank. Norman specified a supercharger on the proviso it emitted exceptionally quiet pulley whine so the car sounds naturally aspirated. By today's supercar standards its 700bhp output is quaint, but it's only got 1,400kg to shove. Norman is unbothered he's waited six years for an inferior power to weight ratio to a McLaren 750S at six times the price. "For me it's not just about pure speed, it's about engagement. When you drive this car it's moving theatre. Sometimes in life it's nice to not be in the fast lane – to enjoy the moment."

Which explains why the P72 continues the latest trend in boutique supercars – a manual gearbox. The prototype used a sequential shifter, but as promised the production car subs in an H-pattern six speed, its exposed linkage forming a Pagani-ish centrepiece to a truly exquisite cabin. Entry just got easier – the carbon monocoque (built to Le Mans prototype crash standards) has had a chunk shaved off the sill. The seats, previously slender quilted buckets, are now carved directly into the tub.

To get comfy, there's ample steering wheel adjustment and the pedal box slides on sprung runners (like the Ford GT and LaFerrari). The designers insist the P72 is more of a grand tourer than its mysterious track only cousin, the Apollo Intensa Emozione, but the driving position's pure motorsport. You're cradled forward, backside low, heels raised, sighting the nose through mountainous front wings. It's not a roomy cockpit, but glass door tops flood light in to ease the intimidation factor and, let's be honest, invite anyone nearby to gawp inside.

There are 179 individual aluminium fixtures inside the P72. I only mention that because there are a mere 160 pieces in the new Bugatti Tourbillon's cabin, which shares the same brightwork supplier. You can demand any colour you like if rose gold isn't your thing, and there are three finishes on offer: hand brushed, hand polished or 'blasted' matte. The rev counter spins to IX – yes, it's engraved with Roman numerals. Physical dials were a must. But in 2025 even that's a challenge, due to the quantity of warning lights now mandated to live in a driver's eyeline.

Weird, how legislation is sticking its nose in even on limited run unobtainium. The P72 is actually too low to comply with future roof height regs. And it's corked with a pathetic 63dB exhaust noise limit. At least the silencers are expensively ceramic coated. With a wink, lead designer Jakub Jodlowski hints there will be a fruitier exhaust on offer for customers who also own their local constabulary.

Sprouting from the ceiling are knurled knobs to operate the heater and electric windows. Obviously. What you won't find is a volume knob, a USB port, or any infotainment whatsoever. Again, the justification is timelessness. Touchscreens age like milk. Engraved jewellery doesn't. The only concession to digital tech is the (optional) rearview mirror, actually a display for the reversing camera conceded by serial supercar owner Norman who frequently berates slit windowed exotica while manoeuvring around narrow parking garages in Hong Kong. Put those violins away.

But driving modes? No. Active aero is absent. A button for switching off the ESC suggests one allowance of modern driver aids, but designer Jakub explains the car is optimised for low drag (hence the longtail and minimal shutlines) while his team has taken handling notes from the Goodwood Revival, not the British Grand Prix. Mechanical grip, rather than the invisible cheat code of downforce, and a preference for being steered on the throttle. Really? In an airbag free mid-engined unicorn priced at £1.4m plus taxes? If you say so.

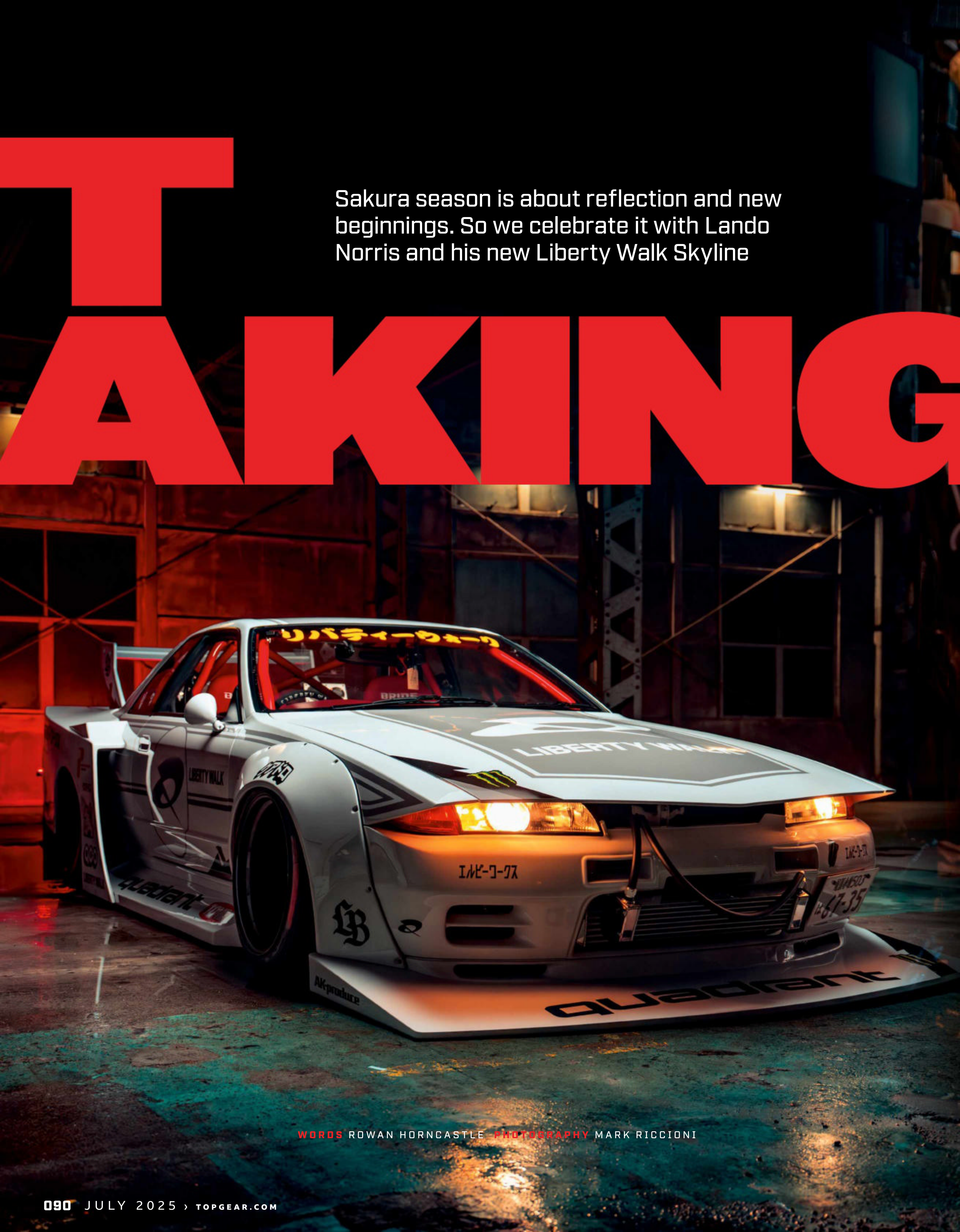
Every time an engineer earnestly explains how their supercar's been painstakingly optimised for thrills, I visualise the hundreds of examples forlornly snoozing in fitted pyjamas buried within humidity stabilised bunkers, quietly appreciating in value, longing for their owner to strike a financial iceberg to force a quick sale to the next collector. Choi insists his 72 chosen ones have been selected because they'll drive theirs. It'd be tragic if they didn't. Norman is considerably greyer than when we last met and admits the delays have been punishing. COVID and his own perfectionism took their toll. There's been uncertainty over where the car would be built. Italy, then America, now confirmed with race team HWA in AMG's Affalterbach-yard. Not to mention legal wranglings, and the sell-off of his previous hypercar revival, Apollo.

Later this year, we'll discover if the drive has been worth the turmoil. The new De Tomaso has been a very long time coming. But if it proves to be a timeless tonic for the ages, a piffling six year supercar gestation won't feel like a long time at all.

**Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com***

# TAKING

Sakura season is about reflection and new beginnings. So we celebrate it with Lando Norris and his new Liberty Walk Skyline


リバティーウォーク
LIBERTY WALK
LIBERTY WALK
BRIDE
エルビーワークス
LB
quadrant
quadrant
AK-produce

**WORDS** ROWAN HORNCASTLE **PHOTOGRAPHY** MARK RICCIONI

# LIBERTY

“WE’RE NOT IN JAPAN FOR THE F1. QUITE THE OPPOSITE”

BRIDE
Low MAX

As salarymen barge past, diving drunkenly into cupboard sized restaurants, the neon lights of Shinjuku dance in puddles beneath Lando Norris' feet. "This is the most arcade game vibe ever," he says, voice bubbling with excited enthusiasm.

And perhaps only in Japan – land of ceremony, restraint, and polite indifference – could the most talked about man on the F1 grid saunter through a city, hood up, without a phone being shoved in his face. Well, until I whip mine out to show him a photo from the first time *TopGear* interviewed him, back in 2019.

"S**t, would you look at that!" he exclaims, unleashing his trademark helium giggle. Back then, he was a 19-year-old prepping to become the youngest British driver ever to start a Grand Prix. Now, 134 GPs later – with a neck like an oak trunk – he's visibly stronger, more confident, but still fantastically lucid and funny.

"Time flies and it's mad to think it's my seventh year in Formula One. It felt like not long ago I was trying to get to Formula One. Don't get me wrong, everything still feels crazy, but more normal now – like Formula One is my everyday life, rather than feeling like I've got an everyday life and then I do Formula One."

But we're not in Japan for the F1. Quite the opposite. We're in Tokyo – 250 miles from the paddock in Suzuka – so Lando can take his new car for a midnight spin. A very much not a McLaren, 600bhp Liberty Walk R32 Nissan Skyline – Lando's first JDM car to join an evergrowing and increasingly juicy collection.

"I had the Gumball 3000 Top Trumps cards when I was a kid and always remember the Nissan Skyline. Back then, I also played *Gran Turismo*, and I remember racing around the streets of Japan – it just looked awesome. So I've always wanted to see what that's like in reality."

Tonight is that make a wish moment for Lando. And as we make our way to rendezvous with his insane kaido racer inspired GT-R, he fills me in on his increasing love for road cars. "I just love to drive. I know Lewis [Hamilton] has had a lot of cars, and probably has a better collection of cars, but I really love to drive."

Something Instagram's algorithm loves too. When we first interviewed Lando, he was driving a diesel Mini. Nowadays, he's seen rocking up to lunch in Monaco looking like the cardboard cutout of cool in his knuckle-bitingly beautiful Blu Julie over orange leather, gold wheeled Lamborghini Miura P400.

"My Miura is my favourite. It's the first proper, proper car that I bought, and probably my favourite in terms of looks. And it was all

WHO IS LANDO NORRIS?

**In 1999, we interviewed Lando. Basically a lifetime ago**

because I watched the Lamborghini movie. Growing up, I was more into modern cars – I think most young kids are. But I've definitely switched to vintage cars because I've changed quite a lot. I know myself a lot more now – what I like, what I don't. And when I first had my own money to spend, I was just getting crap. I was like, why on Earth did I ever buy those things?"

With a Ferrari F40, AC Cobra, Carrera GT and Fiat 500 Jolly all having taken up space in his garage (plus, naturally, the greatest hits of modern McLarens, including a 765LT Spider, P1 and Senna) that Top Trumps pack has morphed from cardboard to actual bits of metal and carbon fibre. It's an eclectic, considered selection, with a McLaren F1 and Mazda 787B still being the ultimates to collect. So why has he bought and modified a two-door 1990s Japanese coupe?

"If I could, I'd have a collection of Skylines. But the R32 is the one that you don't see as much – it's not as obvious and as noticeable." Until you put a Liberty Walk widebody Super Silhouette racecar bodykit on it.

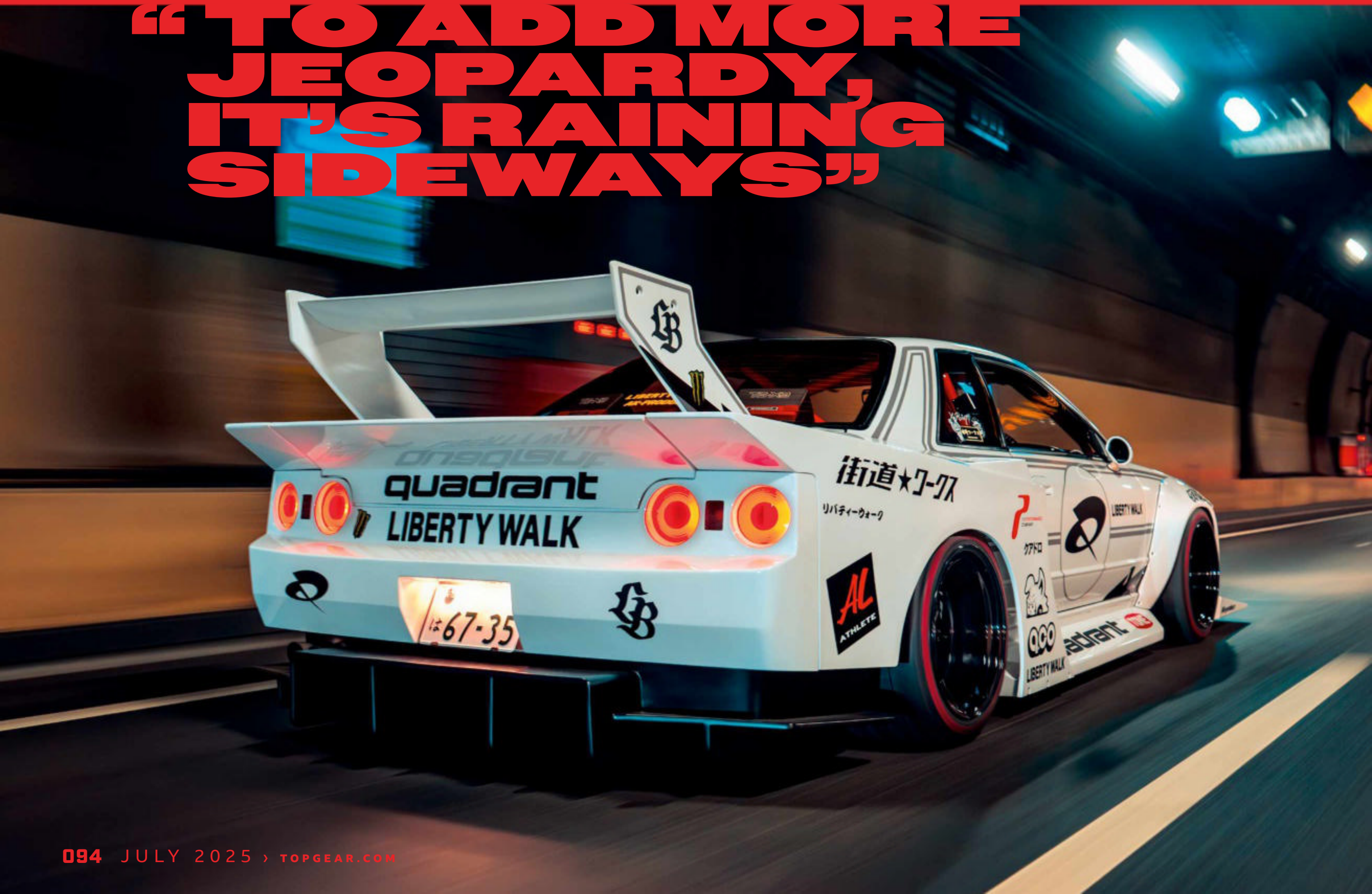
Liberty Walk might be one of the most polarising tuners on the planet. It has become notorious for bandsawing the arches off a multitude of exotic supercars, only to then rivet supersized bodykits and fit slammed air suspension setups in place. For good or bad, people will always have something to say about it. And when Lando – someone in tune with street culture – wanted to collaborate through his motorsport inspired lifestyle and apparel brand Quadrant, there was only one company he wanted to speak to.

In person, the car is even more extreme than pictures. The stance is off the scale, with steplike side skirts, fat arches and massive rims shod in steamroller spec semi-slick Yokohama rubber. Then there's the bespoke bonnet extending out like a peaked cap, a 'jutta' chin spoiler below, and a bumper slung oil cooler in between – it's as JDM wild as it gets and a throwback to Japanese circuit racers of old.

It also makes for a potentially spicy combination when paired with the uprated Garrett single turbo (the size of a wheelie bin lid) that's been bolted onto the side of the iconic RB motor for over 600bhp. To add more jeopardy into the mix, tonight it's raining sideways.

Lando lowers himself into the R32's completely stripped out interior, feeling his way around the custom, removable, deep dish steering wheel before whipping out his phone to video the rev counter as he tickles the throttle,

"TO ADD MORE JEOPARDY, IT'S RAINING SIDEWAYS"



**Nothing to see here, just two guys sharing a moment over their love of cars**

revs the raw RB25 engine and hears the turbo whistle, wastegate flutter, and the valvetrain tick at idle. "I'm nervous," he says. Which makes me nervous, given he's off the back of securing McLaren's first constructors' championship – its first team title since 1998, a year before Lando was born – and in the fight for the drivers' championship.

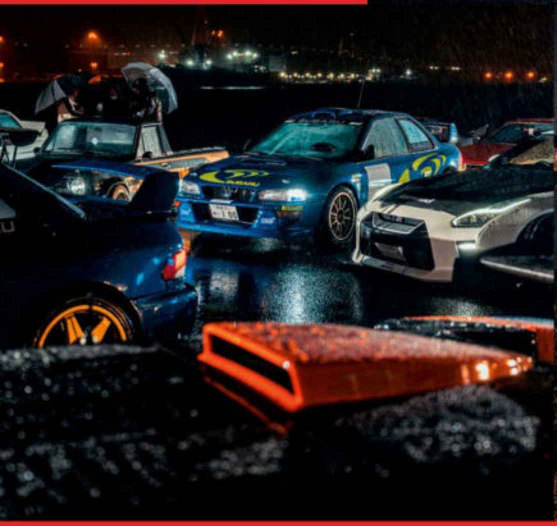
He tails an R34 Liberty Walk Skyline and a Silvia S15 out of the parking area, the iconic metallic, raspy urgency of the engine gives way to fire out of the exhaust, licking the back bumper as wheelspin stutters as he engages second gear. Following the car down the Wangan, it is that vision Lando dreamt of in pixels as a kid. The presence of the car is extraordinary, especially decked out in a striking white livery. The exhaust tone ricocheting off tunnels never gets old, providing vein raising excitement with each prod of the throttle.

We end up in an unremarkable dock with the most remarkable collection of Tokyo's finest cars, including the world's only road legal GT2 Diablo, slant nose Porsches, E30 M3s, Mercedes 190E Evo IIs, drift cars, slammed kei trucks and everything else in between. Lando airs down the suspension and gets out laughing.

**There's cool, and then there's drifting alongside an F1 superstar cool**

SKYLINE
LBWK
5
COLLET
23

Red car behind the orange one. It's just like being at the office for Lando...



SUPPORT VIOLENT DRIVING

The guilty smile of a man actively dodging his trainer's strict race curfew

"Sheeesh!" he says, blowing out his cheeks. "When the turbo came in, I was like... nope. Try again... NOPE! It's wild. But that sound is insane when I give it some. But I'm scared to give it some! I was nowhere close to being flat."

It's humbling to know that a man who straps himself into an F1 car weekly finds a boosty rear wheel drive Skyline daunting. It proves he's not a robot. But it's partly why Lando has become a fan favourite of F1, having stayed grounded and cemented in reality, partly through Quadrant, an outlet that started during COVID.

"Quadrant is nothing to do with F1," he says emphatically. "Racing is intertwined, but it's personal. It's a cool opportunity for fans to see more about me and our other athletes. It's a bit more special as it's very different to seeing me driving around in a car on TV for the whole weekend."

He's refreshingly open. And is revered for utilising his platforms to openly discuss the psychological challenges of competing at the highest level, acknowledging the pressures of perfectionism and the impact on his performance. But his attitude to the internet and time online has changed.

"I used to spend too many hours online, especially during COVID," he says. "I'd sim race every day, just as much as Max [Verstappen] does now. But I simply don't enjoy it as much nowadays. I guess that's just because I've changed. I don't hate it. And I still love playing games, especially when they're with my friends, but I've become less of a fan of the internet in general."

The expectation on a modern Formula One driver is immense. Not only do they need to risk their lives on track – they need to be insatiably marketable. As well as a driver, they are a brand, billboard and social media content creator all in one. But the exposure to people's thoughts and criticism online is something Lando constantly battles.

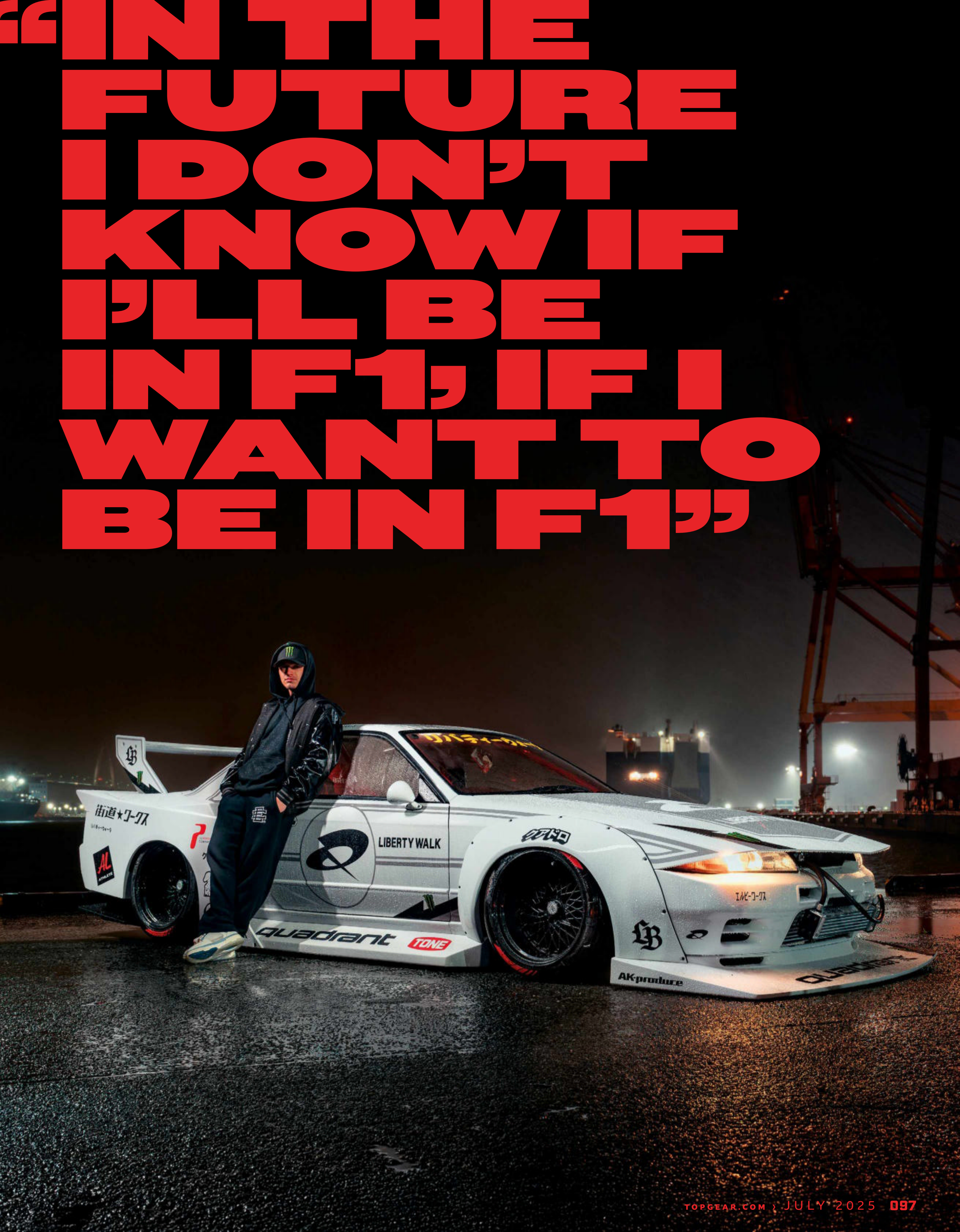
"Social media is great because you get to share elements of your life and get a lot more support. But at the same time, I just hate the fact that I look at it so much and my mood can change depending on comments. Then I hate it. I have moments where I delete all of it and won't even look at my phone for days or weeks. And then there'll be moments when I enjoy it and I like to share content – like my JPEG stuff."

That's his lo-fi, behind the scenes Instagram account (@lando.jpg), shot with a pocket point and shoot. He gets it out to capture the meet, before hopping back into the Skyline to whip donuts in front of a wall of million pound metal. Through the windscreen you can see him with a mile wide smile.

Having shown him that photo from seven years ago, when the adrenaline dies down, I ask what he sees seven years from now. "In the future I don't know if I'll be in Formula One, if I *want* to be in Formula One. Obviously, I want to achieve everything I can achieve, but I don't know if I have the mindset of 'I want to be remembered as being one of the best in Formula One' or remembered for achieving one or two or three world championships. I don't know if that's my ultimate goal. I don't know if I want to be remembered. I just want to go and do my own thing, enjoy life with my friends, have a family and watch my kids grow up, see if they want to do racing or any other sports."

It's rather profound for someone so young. But fitting, given we're in Tokyo during Sakura season – a time marked in Japan for reflection and renewal. And as the rain lashes down, cherry blossom sticks to the Liberty Walk Skyline's wide arches – something quietly symbolic as Lando seems to be in a season of change himself – more sure of who he is, and what matters to him. Whether or not he ends up a world champion, we'll have to wait and see.

# "IN THE FUTURE I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL BE IN F1, IF I WANT TO BE IN F1"


LIBERTY WALK
quadrant
TONE
AK-produce
quadrant

SAYONARA, GODZILLA ONE LAST RIDE THROUGH TOKYO IN THE R35 NISSAN GT-R

# GOODBYE GODZILLA

NISSAN
横浜305
る59-96

R35

# KING OF THE MONSTERS!

The end is nigh for the GT-R. Please join us in a celebration of its very existence and a commemoration of the supercar scalps it took

**WORDS** VIJAY PATTNI **PHOTOGRAPHY** TOBY THYER

**1** Tetsuya Yamano, triple Super GT champ, super cool **2** 3.8-litre V6 produces lots of power and shoots out atomic breath **3** Tunnel runs in big shouty cars never get old **4** T-Spec sandwiched by a pair of wonderfully brown modified GT-Rs **5** Don't step on them

# GOJIRA IS DEAD.

Japan's motoring *kaiju* has been laid to rest, driven back into the icy depths of the Pacific and far away from this clanging metaphor. The supercar world is safe once again.

Because for the best part of 18 years, the 'R35' Nissan GT-R was busy laying waste to all that came before it. Including, in its very earliest incarnation, Jeremy Clarkson's neck. "They haven't built a new car here," JC said, right before Nissan's reanimated Godzilla attacked him. "They've built a new *yardstick*."

Perhaps foolishly, we reanimated the R35 from its deep slumber in Nissan's Yokohama HQ for one last ride; a valedictory sendoff on home turf before a hot ride to its natural hunting ground – the Hakone turnpike – flanked by pair of modified GT-Rs that never left our side. Our travels quickly taught us that Japan's a brilliant paradox of a nation: high tech with an ancient, historic core.

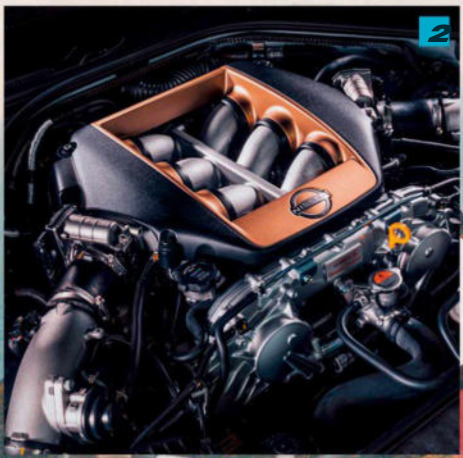
Just like Godzilla, itself an unconventional yardstick wrapped in a paradox. Here was a car designed like a brick that featured cutting edge aerodynamics. A car that appeared to be an artificial, self driven computer on wheels that required very human effort to tame and extract performance from.

And crucially, a four seater, £50k-ish Nissan (at launch) that'd eat a BMW M3 for breakfast and eye up a Porsche 911 Turbo for lunch. Ferrari and Lamborghini were on the menu for dinner. Not that the R35's chief engineer, Kazutoshi Mizuno, ever saw it that way, thinking of his 2007 baby as a "new kind of supercar, one with no competitors".

Hiroshi Tamura – the GT-R's product planner back in those heady days – elaborated. "Some people asked me, 'What were your competitors for the R35?'" Tamura-san told *TopGear*. "In some circumstances like a track day, it's OK to compare to some of the other performance cars.

"But to be honest, I didn't see any sports car as a rival, because of the 'trend making' standpoint of this car. We did not see any rivals because we were so focused on going our own way," he added.

1



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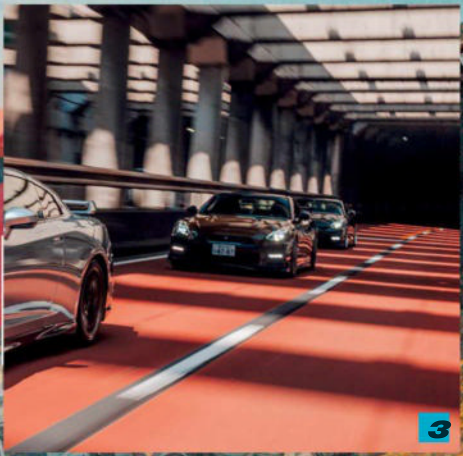
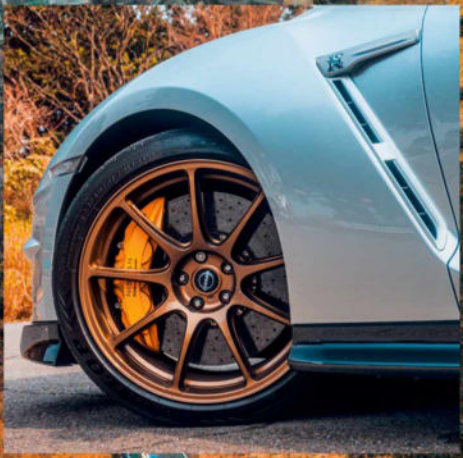


3

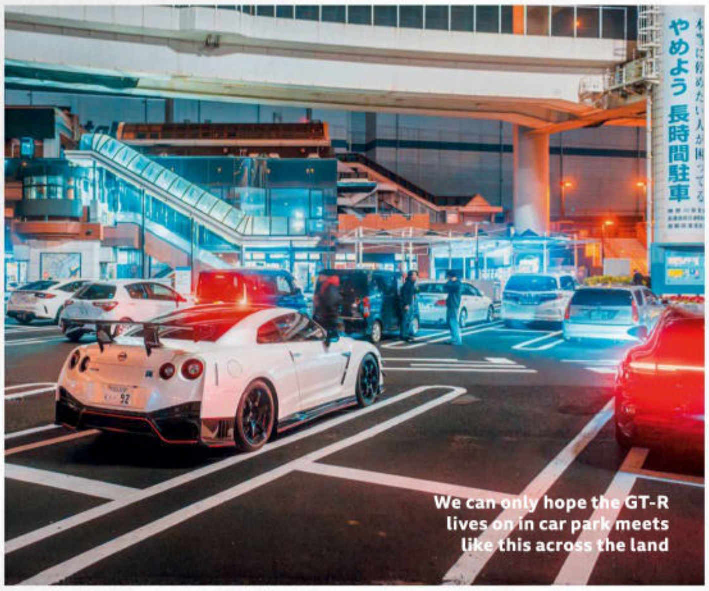
> “IT’D EAT AN M3 FOR BREAKFAST AND A 911 FOR LUNCH”



4

5

The GT-R's fate rests in new Nissan boss – and fast car fan – Ivan Espinosa's hands



We can only hope the GT-R lives on in car park meets like this across the land

In a more innocent time, we thought *this* was a screen obsessed PlayStation cabin. How times change…

No one in their right mind takes the direct route home in a GT-R. Last we saw of these three

*Trend making.* That's the yardstick Clarkson was talking about. Nissan wasn't trying to build a nondescript machine that'd simply outthrust a 911 Turbo for half the price, it was trying to lay down a performance benchmark for the 21st century. Back then it probably had no idea just how much of the 21st century it'd see.

A period in which it saw off challenges left, right, and sometimes sideways. The first of which just happened to be the fastest car on Earth: the 997 911 Turbo. "Driving these two cars back to back," *TopGear*'s Bill Thomas said back in 2008, "it's not long before you realise that the Nissan makes the Porsche seem old fashioned. The GT-R is truly extraordinary."

"The GT-R is part car, part Terminator," editor at large Jason Barlow noted when it faced up against the Audi R8.

"To stand beside this car now is to look upon a near perfect representation of the 21st century sports car," added *TG*'s Matt Master when Godzilla faced off against the Evo X. "It's back to that schoolboy fantasy. Otherworldly, yet right here in front of me, and as spectacular and dramatic in the metal as any car I've ever clapped eyes on."

It remains unexpectedly, spectacularly brutal even in 2025, perhaps more so in an age of unearned, easy electric pace. The sheer force unleashed when the T-Spec's 562bhp V6 awakens is genuinely incredible, soundtracked by an engine note that's a mix of fine tuned heavy industry and turbo hiss. God, this thing is supernaturally quick.

More than its technical prowess and sheet metal attraction is the supercar banner it carried on behalf of Japan. "It's an important car because it's the first time a Japanese car was properly tested at the Nürburgring," Tetsuya Yamano told *TopGear*. Yamano-san won three consecutive Japanese Super GT300 titles from 2004 to 2006, so he knows a thing or three about JDM honour. "It was the first time Japan really went all out to make a 'special' car.

"It makes Japanese people proud because *we* made it. Before this, we could never really battle with German and Italian supercars, but with the R35 we finally could," he added.

"If I had one last lap in it? Fuji Speedway, 300kph," he said with a smile.

Though, 300kph [186mph] is just the start of another chapter of the R35's story, because it continued a very fine tradition instigated by its *kaiju* predecessors: being tuned to within an inch of its life.

"The GT-R is arguably Japan's flagship model," said Iain Litchfield, founder of Litchfield Motors. "More importantly, the R35 has built a community of performance enthusiasts who have bought into and built on the GT-R's reputation."

The GT-R has been at the heart of this tuning house for more than 17 years, so Litchfield's been privy to the GT-R's history like no other. "The real difference the GT-Rs have had is allowing their enthusiastic owners a blank canvas to create their dream car," he added. Dream cars that'd routinely see upwards of a thousand horsies without breaking a sweat.

Nissan itself treated the GT-R's base to a healthy package of updates over the years, steadily improving the raucous, untamed heavyweight's technology and refinement, but also its power and purpose as the years rolled by and the competitor landscape – and consumer desires – shifted.

Against the Honda NSX in 2018 – a fiendishly complex hybrid supercar that instantly made the R35 seem even more like its neolithic silver screen namesake – *TG*'s Tom Ford noted that "it might basically be the same car as the giant killer that arrived in 2007, but it just goes to show that the basic recipe was very, very right".

A recipe crafted by Mizuno-san and Tamura-san that put the owner and enthusiast at the heart of everything. Forget the myth and technology and warp speed and competition and cricked necks and shattered supercar egos – *you* were the biggest part of the GT-R's story.

"I realised the most important thing is that the car is for a customer," Mizuno-san told *TG* back in 2012. "The GT-R is a Japanese supercar. What is Japan? It is *takumi* [artisanship]. This is Japanese spirit. It is a special skill that adds something special in the customer mind and passes it on to the next generation.

**NISSAN GT-R**
**T-SPEC [R35]**
**Price:** ¥20,350,000 (£105,000)
**Engine:** 3.8-litre twin turbo V6, 562bhp, 467lb ft
**Performance:** 0–62mph in 2.8secs, 200+mph
**Economy:** 24.6mpg, 275g/km $CO_2$
**Weight:** 1,760kg

## "THE GT-R EMBODIES STRONG POWER, CONTROLLED BY TECHNOLOGY"

"So the GT-R is *takumi*. I do this for the customer, not for myself or company pride," he added.

In the here and now, Tamura-san painted with the same brush. "The question was how do we make performance car fans happy, and the answer was the R35," he told *TG*. "I wanted to create happiness.

"The GT-R is like *Gundam* tech. It embodies strong power, controlled by technology. You are the commander. The car is the extension.

"Its shape is not Italian exotic. It's not American muscle, or German tech, but it's the spirit of our super sports car scene.

"It's like the heartbeat of Japan," he added.

Only Nissan knows what ingredients will feature in the recipe for the next GT-R... if there even is one. At the time of writing, the company is undergoing yet another recovery plan, slashing jobs, culling factories, and ditching all post-2026 new car development.

The Hyper Force concept from 2023 pointed to a steroidal 1,341bhp AWD electric Godzilla, but that too looks like it's been driven back into an icy slumber while Nissan fights for its very life.

But Tamura-san reckons we shouldn't get too hung up on what'll power the new Godzilla if it ever resurfaces from the Pacific, but rather – like this R35 – what it'll represent.

"We need to show the next trend," he said. "This is a very important role for the GT-R. In my opinion the most important thing is how the customer, how the audience *feels*."

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# RETRO

BECAUSE THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO

HEADLINER

# TIME MACHINE

**An identikit Ford Escort to the one that saw Frank Gardner to the British Saloon Championship in 1968? Sign us up…**

**WORDS** OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLGUN KORDAL

The year is 1968. And if you're a racing driver in the British Saloon Car Championship and your name's not Frank Gardner, bad luck. You just lost. Because to be fast that year, only one thing would do: the Alan Mann prepped Ford Escort. Gardner won all but two of the 11 rounds, in a car in its first year of competition.

No car is fast immediately. It takes a while for engineers, mechanics and designers to learn their foibles, extract their potential. Unless you're Alan Mann. An instinctive, innovative engineer, he'd set up by himself in 1962 and two years later he'd won the contract to be Ford's official racing partner in Europe, running everything from Mustangs and Falcons to Cortinas, GT40s and this legendary Group 5 Escort.

Group 5 was as close as things got to a no limits touring car. This car's iconic bubble arches were crafted to cope with fatter rubber, all new multi-link rear suspension was designed, the steering column was realigned so it projected at a straighter angle and the steering rack was actually housed *inside* the engine crossmember. Apparently this car had a

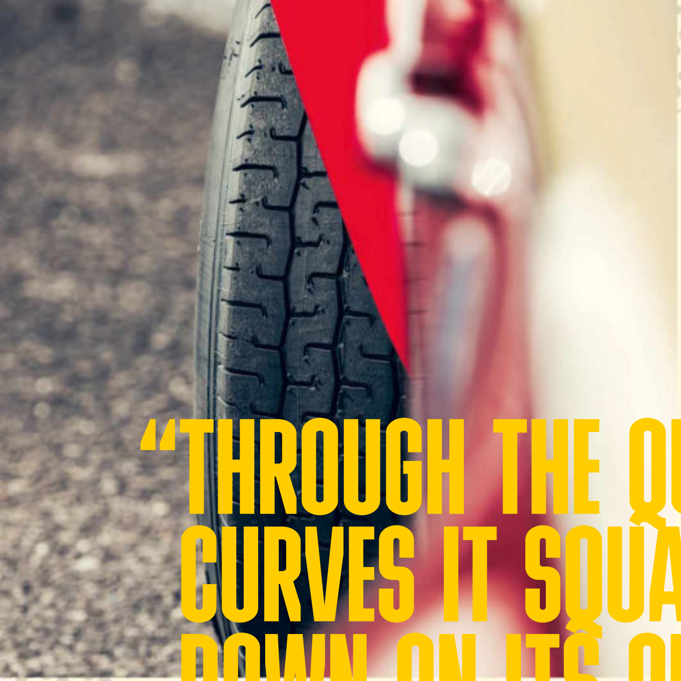
## “PAINTED IN MANN’S ICONIC RED AND GOLD COLOURS IT WAS AS SWEET TO LOOK AT AS IT WAS TO DRIVE”

fair amount in common with the GT40s Mann also campaigned. Rounding out the radical package was a 1.8-litre Lotus Twin Cam, developing around 230bhp. The result was a small, light, well balanced and fantastically eager racing car. Painted in Mann’s iconic red and gold colours it was as sweet to look at as it was to drive. Few cars look as good in a corner as this one.

Ford supplied Alan Mann with six cars that season. At the end of the following year, four were returned, one had been converted to a different specification, and one – the famous, championship winning XOO 349F – was left with Mann. And there it remained. Alan died in 2012, but his son Henry continues to maintain and campaign the car.

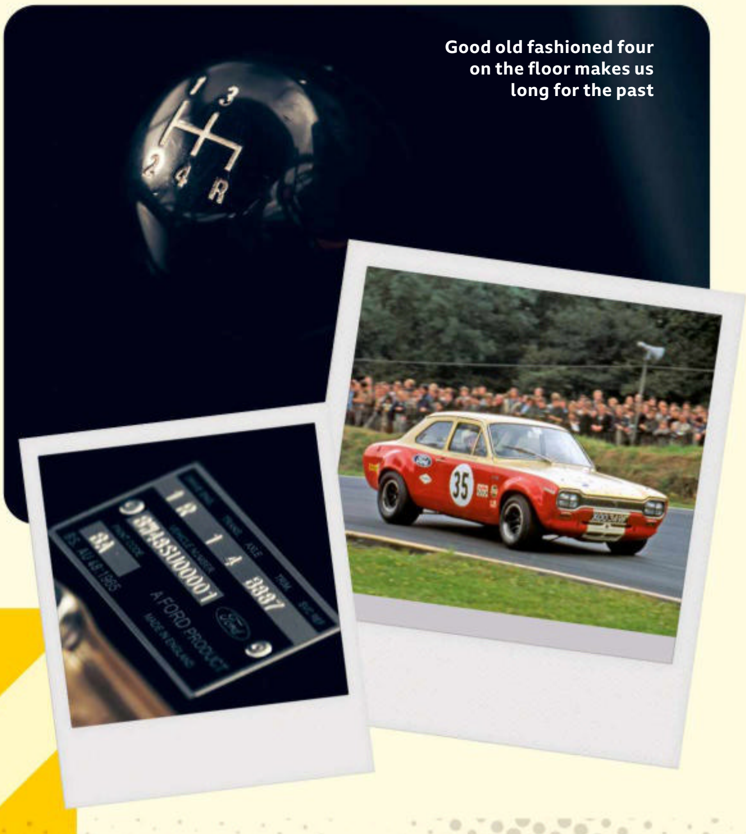
This isn’t it, though. What you’re looking at here is an exact nut and bolt replica. The original was stripped down with every component scanned to reverse engineer it precisely as it was. The only way to tell it apart from the original when I line them up alongside each other is that only one has a roll cage. The new one – it’s now a safety requirement for historic racing. But this isn’t a one-off – the plan is to build 24 identikit replicas. There’s a pleasing circular story here. Just as Alan Mann was Ford’s official racing partner back in the 1960s, so has Boreham Motor Works (which now owns Alan Mann Racing) recently become Ford’s official restomod partner. You may have heard about other fast Fords it has in the pipeline – a reimagined Group B RS200 and a £295,000 roadgoing fast Escort with a 295bhp 2.1-litre twin cam good for 10,000rpm.

But this isn’t a restomod, it’s a non-road legal period piece that Henry very much hopes owners will choose to race. It’s what it was designed for after all. And what it feels like. I want to start slowly but the car would rather I didn’t. It might be an old design, but it’s a racing car, it’s only got one speed and it’s not ‘pitlane pootle’. The racing twin plate clutch needs revs to pull away, first can be hard to find, there’s plenty of vibration and as I trundle out on to the track it honestly feels like all the wheels are pulling in different directions. For the first few hundred yards I wondered at the wisdom of an exact recreation.



“THROUGH THE QUICK CURVES IT SQUATS DOWN ON ITS OUTSIDE REAR WHEEL AND JUST POWERS THROUGH”

Alan Mann 68 Edition demands you drive it hard. Ollie was only too happy to oblige



Good old fashioned four on the floor makes us long for the past

And thereafter I had the time of my life. As with all racing cars, it needs to be used hard, and then it just works. Get some pressure in the suspension, some load in the engine and you feel the whole car snap to attention.

As you'd hope it's a period correct driving experience. This is not a car in which all you do is accelerate, brake and steer and it responds with ruthless precision. You're busy the whole time, juggling the steering and throttle, rowing the gearlever around the four (yes, only four) gate box, planning the next corner. Even driving in a straight line requires concentration – the Alan Mann 68 Edition (to give this one its proper name) prefers to be turning.

I assumed my steering inputs would be large and sweeping, that it would settle satisfyingly in corners but that's not the case initially. It's light – just 795kg without fluids – and the wheelbase is short, so every single twitch you make has an instant and marked impact on your speed and trajectory. There's nothing lazy or languid about it and being quick in it isn't about armfuls of opposite lock and big angles, it's about playing with the balance at the margins.

The brakes are way more potent than you might expect, but this is not a car your trail brake all the way to the apex. Instead you roll off the brakes sooner, turning in and then immediately back on the power to adjust line and trajectory. Great fun, but it was a little fidgety through long, fast corners so, at Henry's suggestion, we soften the rear dampers off.

It's a transformation. Through the quick curves that define Thruxton the Escort now squats smoothly down on its outside rear wheel and just powers through, nose up, tail down, all the pressure seemingly through that one wheel. Those pictures we've all seen of touring cars back then four wheel drifting through corners, almost waggling the unloaded front wheel in the air? This is what it feels like and it's utterly brilliant. The full 1960s experience.

Massively absorbing, way more entertaining than any modern fast, focused 'n' flat racer. This is a car that uses its suspension differently, that isn't designed to keep the platform as level and neutral as possible at all times, but instead lets you move the pressure around, so you can use the weight to help you uncork the engine's full potential.

The four cylinder barks loudly and aggressively inside, ringing through my period pisspot helmet. It's an eager beaver hard charger, but 205bhp on the UK's fastest racetrack means a lot of time spent flat in fourth. But still, 205bhp from 1.8 litres on Weber carbs with only two valves per cylinder? That's impressive. Through the slower corners it's the throttle's instant response and its effect not only on speed but balance that is so notable. And the fact you're forever manipulating gears and trying to finesse heel 'n' toe downshifts via the sharp clutch and a gearlever skinnier than most column stalks. The shift is imprecise at low speeds, a bit vague, but once up and running I never missed – or even fluffed – a shift.

This is a special car. Wonderfully vivid and fantastically engaging, one with genuine historic importance and a cracking back story. The cost (it hasn't been announced) will be terrifying, but it's vanishingly rare to drive something that's not just period correct, but correct down to the tiniest detail, that is so emphatically authentic and true to what's gone before. It put me in a time capsule. The thought of lining up alongside a bunch of other touring cars and tearing strips off each other might just be one of the most amusing things you could do in a car.

Conway
ARX·37B

"I could easily head for a drive-through, but any old car can fit through one of those. I go for a more literal meals-on-wheels experience"

# The big picture

## PEEL P50 'ALMOST' GETS DAN SQUISHED

**"The only thing between me and squashy death is a few millimetres of, well, it might as well be papier mâché. And then my engine cuts out. Just dies. I've been flat out at 38mph and it's hot and humid outside. The little moped engine is overheating and chooses this precise moment to conk out. Behind me, the truck hisses and creaks as the brakes are pumped and its trailer fishtails out of line. I frantically crank the lever to refire the engine, but there's no sign of life. So I veer right and roll to a stop on the hard shoulder."**

**WORDS:** DAN READ **PHOTOGRAPHY:** DANIEL BYRNE

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

### #68

# Grand Prix Manager 2

### PC, 1996

When most people buy an F1 game, they expect to be doing the exciting bit – you know, the driving at 200mph. Occasionally though, a game appears that puts you in charge of the plate spinning management skills required behind the scenes to keep a Grand Prix team running. Yes, it does feel a bit like turning up to a fancy dress party as Batman's accountant but, hey, it takes all sorts.

*Grand Prix Manager 2* from Microprose had to sell the fantasy of being a team principal way back in the mid 1990s, decades before Netflix made that seem in any way a glamorous role. Like most management games, it's predominately staring at a series of tarted up spreadsheets, in this case balancing the budget and the performance of a race team competing in the 1996 Formula One championship.

To be fair, the backroom dealings in *GPM2* were remarkably comprehensive, perhaps unrealistically so in some cases. In addition to brokering deals with sponsors and negotiating with parts suppliers, you'd also be deciding whether to take a punt on manufacturing branded teddy bears or not. Feels a little below Toto Wolff's pay grade, but what do we know?

Obviously those decisions came to a head at the race weekend and yet again as the 'one man band' team principal, you were also in charge of detailed setup decisions, such as wing angle and gear ratios. The race itself played out in a teeny, top down view on a vague approximation of the real circuit layouts. While you had plenty of data at your fingertips, once the action began your contribution mostly extended to telling the drivers how fast to go and crossing your fingers that the 'affordable' engines you got for a song didn't spontaneously detonate. Unrelated: we have serious doubts about the efficacy of crossed fingers. **MIKE CHANNELL**

Jean Alesi 3
INSERT COIN
INSERT COIN

**IMAGES:** GETTY

# DO/~~DON'T~~ MEET YOUR HEROES

## BMW E46 M3 CSL (2003)

**£58,000** (when new)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.2 6cyl | 355 bhp | 4.9 secs | 23.7 mpg | 1,385 kg |

**HERO** Bwaaaarp. BWAAAAARP. What. A. Noise!

**ZERO** Gearbox very much 'of its era'. Prices on application...

**THE NIGHT BEFORE I FINALLY DROVE THE** most fawned over and respected M3 of all time, I relived the moment I became infatuated with it. This 'moment' is 10 minutes and 34 seconds long, and a kindly pirate has lobbed it onto YouTube. It's a review of a 110kg lighter 'superfast' version of the BMW M3 from 2 November 2003, from a BBC motoring show called *TopGear*.

I was 12, so Jeremy's jibes about unnecessary traction control and the legality of semi-slick tyres flew over my head. Two things stuck to me. First, the location. The test was shot on the Isle of Man, as Clarkson drew an allegory between the island's Blair defying, speed limit shunning rejection of bureaucracy and the hardcore CSL's two fingered salute to the nanny state.

Second? The noise. That razor edged metallic bark of induction roar that sounded as if you were watching the whole thing unfold from inside the 3.2-litre straight six's carbon fibre air box.

I've waited 22 years for today. You barely ever see a CSL on the road: only 1,383 were ever made and they're now deemed too valuable to be risked on the public highway or the track days they were bred for. I've never sat in one, never even fogged up the glass peering within and wondering what it'd be like to nestle in that bucket seat. Hold on to that thick suede steering wheel. Maybe even drive it.

This isn't the Isle of Man. But Exmoor is doing a convincing impression of a rock in the Irish sea today – it's gusty with lashings of rain and 100 per cent cloud cover at a height of three feet. The CSL arrives on a transporter, running late because the truck driver thought there'd been some kind of administrative error. "He wants the one with no tyre tread? The really rare one? In this? Are you sure?"

As it rolls off the truck it's striking that the CSL... isn't. In 2003 this hunkered down, carbon roofed coupe was the most butch Beemer ever. Compared to today's beavertooth M3 and the unutterable horror of the iX and XM, the elegant E46 shape is so classy, adorned with CSL upgrades only true M people spot. Asymmetric bumper porthole, *that* ducktail, *those* Y-spoke rims.

I'm stalling because there's a chance this day could become a disappointment – 355bhp is today's hot hatch territory. Time has not been kind to the early 2000's obsession with semi-automated flappy paddle gearboxes – the uncanny valley of lightning shift transmissions before dual clutchers revolutionised cog swapping. There's now a

**WORDS:** OLLIE KEW **PHOTOS:** OLGUN KORDAL

“IT’S EXACTLY AS JOYOUSLY RAW AND REWARDING AS I WANTED IT TO BE”

Body roll? In a hardcore M car? Ahh, the 2000s. A more innocent time

buoyant trade in actually swapping BMW’s clunky SMG box out for a traditional manual.

I wouldn’t. Partly because it’s such a crucial part of the CSL’s character – you have to drive it with consideration, lifting the throttle for each upshift. And partly because the CSL is the bridge between BMW glory days of old and the genesis of the modern configurable M car – all choices, modes and settings. This was the first M to offer switchable shift speeds. Dial it up to the max, then blip the pedal as the needle passes the warm orange lights at the screaming 7,900rpm red line. Yep. It’s exactly as joyously raw, flawed and rewarding as I wanted it to be.

What was in 2003 a rock hard road racer is today leany through turns. But it feels narrow, and responsive in a way a modern M car, even with all that tech, can’t fake. It’s wearing the modern successor to the infamous near slick Michelin Pilot Sport Cups it was sold on, so sploshing down the B3223 still presents an ever present aquaplane danger, but I’ve seen, heard and felt enough to know this is still an all time great street car.

With prices now firmly in ‘POA’ nonsense territory, today’s washout is probably my only chance to bond with a CSL. Still, there’s always a set of headphones and YouTube...

# DRIVEN

### HEAD TO HEAD

## SUPER CABRIOS

Got £200k going spare and fancy yourself a new summer toy? Aston Vantage takes on Ferrari Roma in the battle of the drop-tops

**WORDS** OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ALEX TAPLEY

ASTON MARTIN
UK VN58 AML

The Yorkshire Dales. The sun's out. The roads twist and flow. The Ribblehead viaduct was just back there, now we're getting stone barns and gambolling lambs. Spring is in the air, roofs are down, warm air buffets the cockpits and all seems right with the world. If you were pottering along here in an MX-5 you'd be pretty certain life didn't get much better. And you'd be right. An MX-5 would blend in better, tread more lightly, be more lamb-like than either the Vantage Roadster or Roma Spider. You could save yourself a fortune, and that would be a very Yorkshire thing to do.

They don't really go in for a Prancing Horse up here. Earlier, driving through Hawes, I was feeling a little exposed. Rightly, since the word I caught on the breeze from a pedestrian was 'topspot'. Or something like that. The Aston, subtler in Californian Sage (unless they knew it was called that) was greeted much more warmly. It's clearly a more Yorkshire car.

But these are the cream of the £200k roadster crop. They're more glamorous than a 911 Cabriolet, more honed than a Continental GTC and less tryhard than something mid-engined. The drop-top Vantage is brand new. A follow up to last year's superb coupe, it carries over all the thunderous goodness of that twin turbo V8, trading a little chassis stiffness and hatchback versatility for a soft-top that drops in only 6.8secs.

The Ferrari requires twice as long – 13.5secs – to disassemble itself, but allows that to happen at up to 37, rather than 31mph. The Roma Spider has been around for a few years now, partnering a coupe version that we've previously found a little overcaffeinated. It replaces the folding hard-top Portofino and appears to take a step backwards by using a soft-top.

Swings and roundabouts. It's a little darker inside, with a slightly smaller back window, but it stows away tightly enough to leave a 255 litre boot. Which is entirely inaccessible unless you're on your knees. But at least it tucks the roof away beneath a lid. The Vantage just plonks it back, leaving all sorts of unsightly gaps and holes around the edges. And raised it looks like a turret, where the Ferrari's roof is sleek and integrated.

What a corking looking pair they are, though. I mean seriously, do cars get more emotive than this? The Ferrari has an edge of controversy. From some angles it's sublime, from others the front arch is too tall, the rear deck too high. You can see why they had to do that, trying to package in rear seats, but why bother? They're fantastically compromised.

As with the hard-top Vantage, the Roadster is a strict two seater. The coupe has a big boot that's

**WHAT ABOUT THESE?**

## PORSCHE 911 GTS CABRIO

As usual the phrase "just buy a 911" hoves into view at this point. Because you probably should. Hybrid turbo flat six packs 534bhp

**£147,900**

## MERCEDES-AMG SL63 S E PERFORMANCE

Imagine the Aston's V8, plus electric motors. Over 800bhp, under 3.0secs to 62mph. Arrives soon, probably not worth the wait

**£202,345**

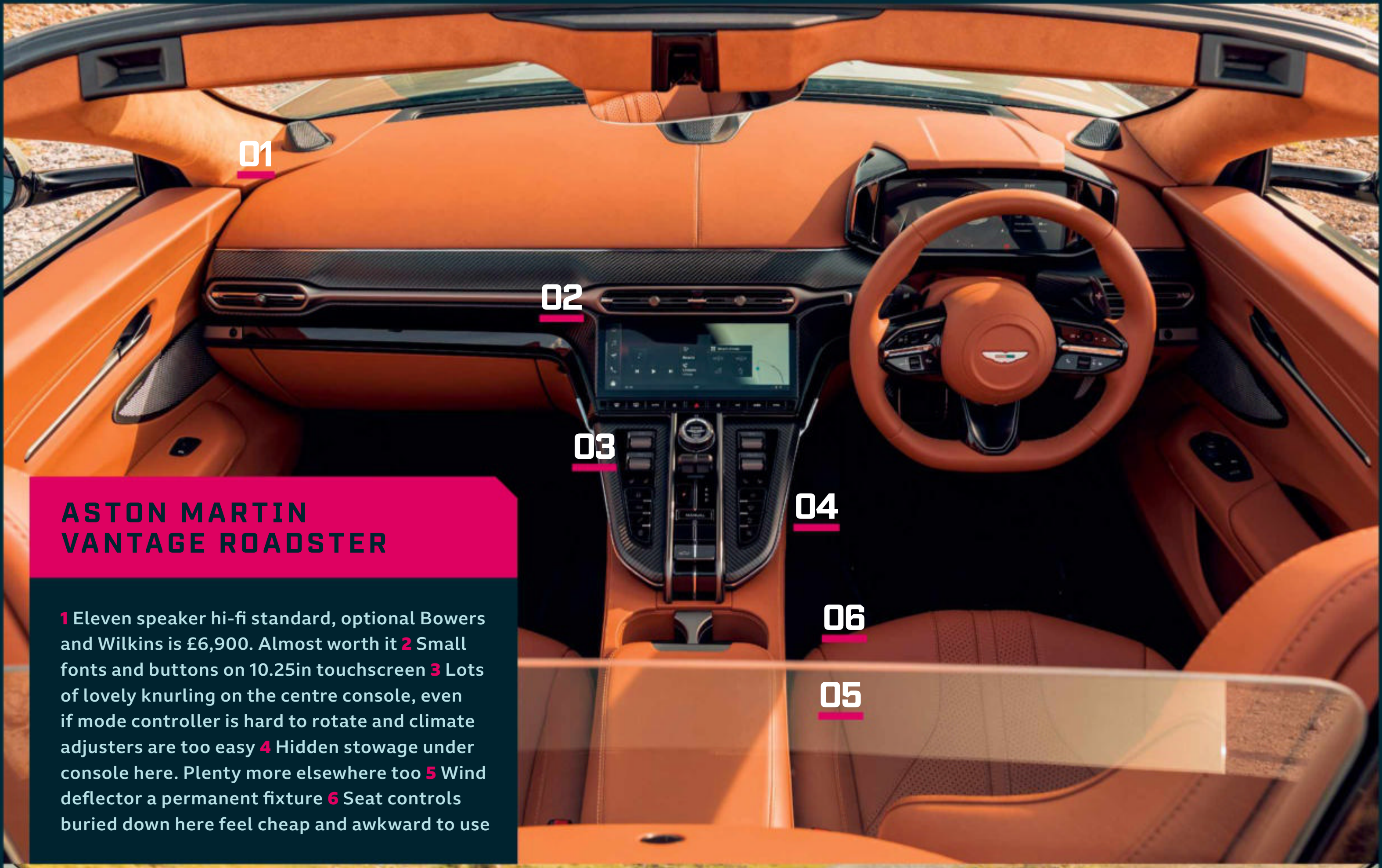
## McLAREN ARTURA

Front engine a bit old man-ish? Have something more complex and compromised! Wickedly fast and communicative, though

**£221,500**

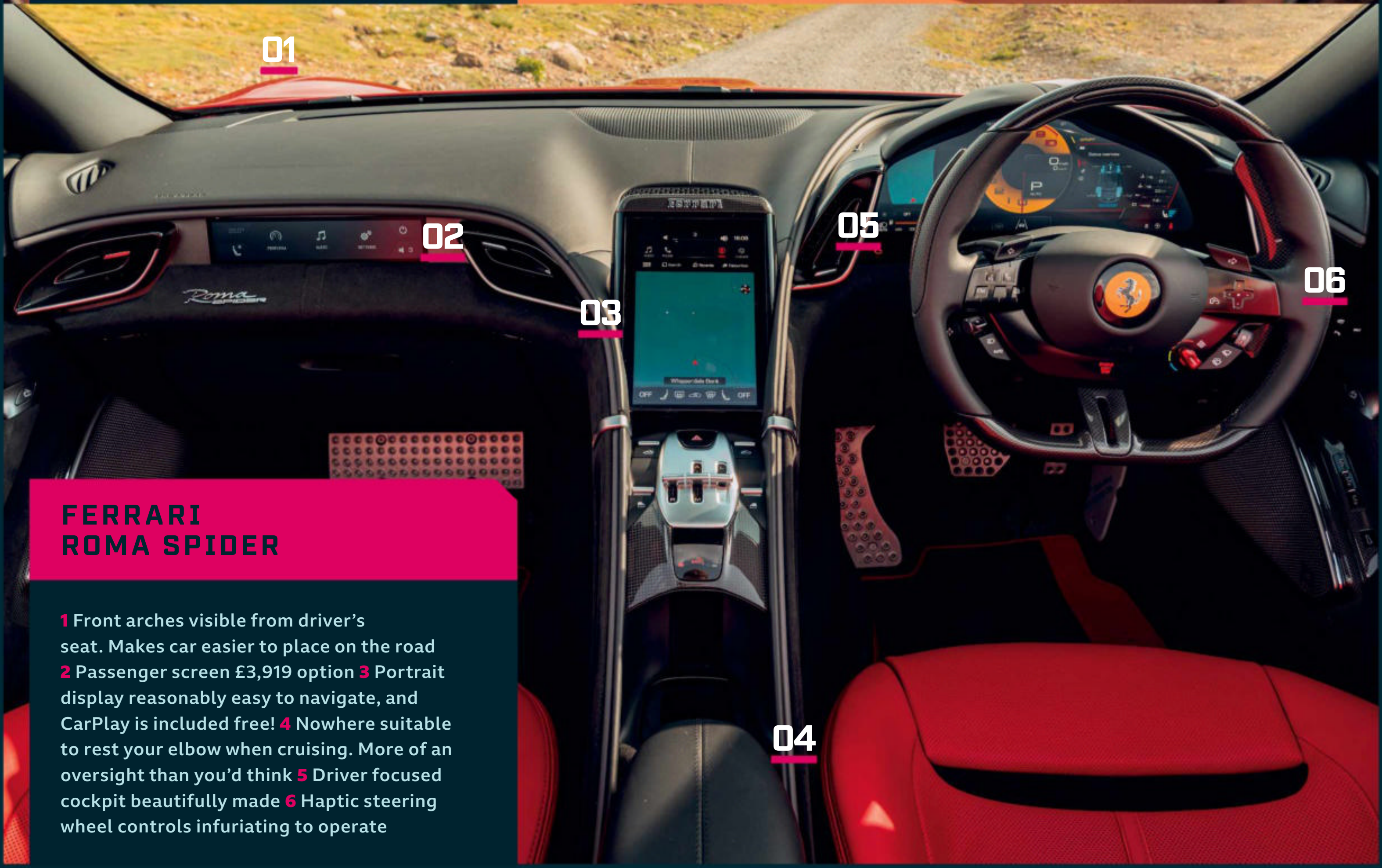
Can't beat the peace and quiet of the countryside… Disappeared when we arrived

“THESE ARE THE CREAM OF THE £200K CROP. MORE GLAMOROUS THAN A 911 CABRIOLET, MORE HONED THAN A CONTI GTC”



## ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE ROADSTER

**1** Eleven speaker hi-fi standard, optional Bowers and Wilkins is £6,900. Almost worth it **2** Small fonts and buttons on 10.25in touchscreen **3** Lots of lovely knurling on the centre console, even if mode controller is hard to rotate and climate adjusters are too easy **4** Hidden stowage under console here. Plenty more elsewhere too **5** Wind deflector a permanent fixture **6** Seat controls buried down here feel cheap and awkward to use



## FERRARI ROMA SPIDER

**1** Front arches visible from driver's seat. Makes car easier to place on the road **2** Passenger screen £3,919 option **3** Portrait display reasonably easy to navigate, and CarPlay is included free! **4** Nowhere suitable to rest your elbow when cruising. More of an oversight than you'd think **5** Driver focused cockpit beautifully made **6** Haptic steering wheel controls infuriating to operate open through into the cabin, here the cockpit is tighter, more enclosed. But also more welcoming than the Ferrari's. The Roma's high sides and upright console push back towards you, as if you've got T-Rex arms and everything is jostling for attention. Attention it doesn't deserve given the state of the steering wheel's haptic controls. How much longer have we got to put up with this, Ferrari? How can a firm that came up with something as brilliantly simple and logical (and widely copied) as the manettino think this is acceptable?

Yes, there's a central touchscreen and that's fine (unless you're viewing in direct sunlight), yet the Aston is easier to operate on the move and, where the Ferrari's cockpit is constantly reminding you of how sporty it is, the Aston asks less of you. Want to just kick back and burble about? It's there for you.

The Ferrari pesters you. Its seats are firmer, the steering sharper, the engine note is higher, the responses quicker. Don't get us wrong, it will pootle, but it's a slightly busier, more highly strung car. This all stems back to the engine, a flat plane crank V8 that sounds more nasally than the Aston's cross plane motor. Otherwise both have similar genetics: twin turbos, capacity of about four litres, over 600bhp and oodles of torque. We used to celebrate this Ferrari motor for its astonishing lag free response. Time's moved on. Yes, the Ferrari cleverly manages torque, so each gear gets more than the one before, but the Aston doesn't bother with such intricate niceties, it just opens the floodgates.

Aston has realised a powerful truth recently. Too much is very amusing. And 590lb ft at 2,750rpm is way too much. Hilariously too much. You just leave it in fourth and dip into the torque when the mood takes you. Which is often because the rumbling V8 sounds so good and the rear squats and wriggles so enticingly.

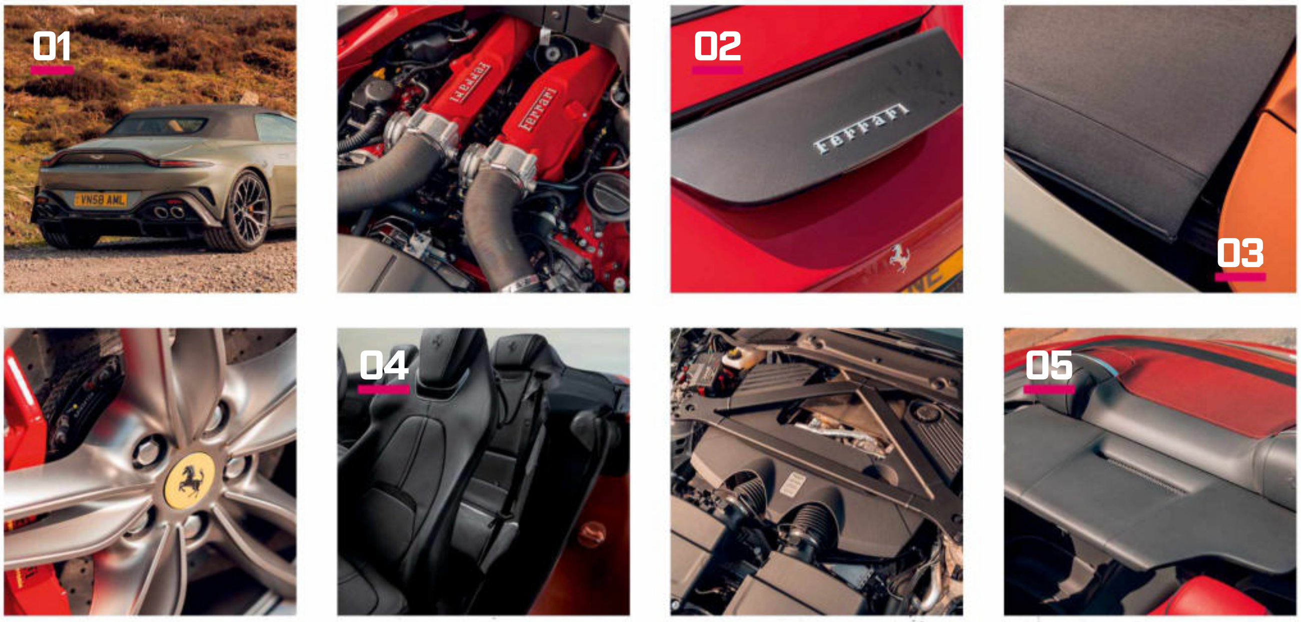
There's no doubt the Ferrari is more sophisticated and more thoroughly engineered. The torque management is exceptional, the twin clutch gearbox is crisp and precise, its throttle is more accurate, the traction control more subtle – the whole way along the powertrain, from combusting fuel at one end to smearing rubber on road at the other, the Ferrari is intellectually superior. But Aston make good noise, go fast, beat chest, ug, ug, ug. It's a more primal experience.

You'd be forgiven for now imagining the Vantage Roadster is a car with looks to die for and appalling manners. That's not quite it. Look past the elegance of those lines and spot the more brutish proportions – the short wheelbase, the wide stance. It sits on the road like a boxer. And moves like one too. Loves a hook into corners, a jab out the other side, a punch up the straights. The Ferrari is more martial arts. Think balance and harmony, a sense of precision and flow.

I haven't come across many roads that buck and weave, toss and turn as much as the road over Whipperdale Bank. In many ways this is the perfect testing ground for a convertible, because the chassis is in a constant state of flex. Aston has reinforced the Vantage's aluminium chassis with extra shear panels, changes to the way it connects with the body, recalibrated rear dampers and retuned gearbox mounts. Although Ferrari is a little coy about exactly what's been done, it does admit the whole sill is new, the pillars and windscreen surround strengthened. All told comes in at 84kg heavier than the coupe, the Aston's up 60kg.

Across this moorland road the Aston loses its composure first. It wants to get its teeth into a road, but can't cling on to itself as well as the coupe when it does. It doesn't do anything alarming, but its movements become a little vague and your confidence ebbs a bit. Ramping up the modes helps.

## ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS



**1** Aston comes with a choice of four roof colours **2** Roma features ugly pop up spoiler. Delivers 95kg of downforce at 155mph **3** Aston has the fastest roof this side of a manual MX-5, but leaves gaps around the edges for stuff to fall into **4** Ferrari says these are rear seats. Humanity begs to differ **5** Ferrari's patented wind deflector looks like it can't possibly work. Does. Brilliantly

## SPECIFICATIONS

| | WINNER<br>ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE ROADSTER | FERRARI ROMA SPIDER | TESTER'S NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PRICE** | **£175,000** OTR<br>(£241,000 as tested) | **£210,838** OTR<br>(£323,799 as tested) | |
| **POWERTRAIN** | 3998cc twin turbo V8 | 3855cc twin turbo V8 | *Both manage to tuck their non-hybrid turbo V8s a long way back in the chassis, and put the gearboxes at the back to balance weight distribution* |
| **TRANSMISSION** | 8spd auto, RWD | 8spd twin clutch, RWD | *Ferrari's twin clutch is snappier and better to use than the Vantage's automatic* |
| **TOTAL POWER** | 656bhp @ 6,000rpm | 612bhp @ 5,750rpm | *Ferrari revs to 7,500rpm, Aston to 7,000rpm, but in neither do you need to venture that high. They're both mighty through the mid range* |
| **TOTAL TORQUE** | 590lb ft @ 2,750–6,000rpm | 560lb ft @ 3,000–5,750rpm | *Ferrari's 560lb ft is only available in high gears. Aston uncorks 590lb ft lower down and in any gear you choose. Lays black lines* |
| **0–62mph** | 3.6secs | 3.4secs | *Faster reacting gearbox and better traction even though its tyres are narrower gives the Ferrari the advantage here* |
| **TOP SPEED** | 202mph | 199mph | *These 200mph top ends are purely academic. Technically impressive to engineer the roofs to cope. Roof down you'll quit before the car does* |
| **CLAIMED ECONOMY/CO2** | 23.0mpg, 279g/km | 24.8mpg, 258g/km | *Aston is longer geared and did 28.6mpg on a long haul, against Ferrari's 26.9. But boy is the Aston thirsty when used* |
| **WEIGHT** | 1,665kg | 1,556kg | *Don't believe a word from either here. These are 'dry' figures free of fluids and options. Add at least 150kg for real world* |
| **BOOTSPACE** | 200 litres | 255 litres | *Ferrari has the advantage on paper, but in reality the Aston's top loading boot is far easier to load and more usefully shaped* |
| **VERDICT** | *Not quite as compelling as last year's Vantage coupe, but still a hugely engaging machine with a monster of an engine. Lacks the Ferrari's engineering pedigree, but does the basics better and oozes character from every pore* | *A better car than the Roma coupe. Still more hectic than the Vantage Roadster, but blends its ride into its handling with such authority that you don't notice where one ends and the other begins. Undone by cabin and prices* | |
| **SCORE** | **8** | **8** | **/10** |

In Sport Plus the ride doesn't deteriorate much, but body control is significantly tauter, the slack and delay curtailed. The Ferrari is more together, the chassis resisting flex better, the steering retaining its precision. If you want to drive hard on tricky roads, have the Ferrari.

In less trying conditions the Aston is, narrowly, the top choice. Neither is a super silent cruiser with the roof up – background hum and buzz penetrates both the Roma's five layer lid and the Vantage's eight (presumably thinner) layers. But on top of that the Aston's ride is always a little busier, has more unwanted movement in it – it's only when the dampers are pressurised in corners that the Vantage genuinely settles. Its manners, however, are generally calmer. The Ferrari is constantly reminding you it's a Ferrari, the Aston is better at switching off and just cruising. If you want to rumble satisfyingly across the Dales, it's there for you.

The Ferrari doesn't settle down and allow distance to slip by as easily, but this is a notably calmer car to drive than the Roma coupe – Ferrari says it was intentional for the Spider to be a mite softer. And it does have a very neat trick. Roof down I thought that the Aston had easily the less turbulent cockpit, as I assumed the Roma's flip up tray that forms the rear seat backrest and springs up through 90° to create a flat deck would do nothing. Emphatically wrong. It actually turns out that this might be the best bit of work that Ferrari's aerodynamicists have ever done.

**Ollie leaving his mark on Yorkshire. Aston's now on slicks**

The Ferrari feels the better built, more thoroughly engineered car. But then so it should for a list price some £35,000 above the Aston's. And that's before options, where this car is bejeweled to the tune of £113,000. Like the multilayer Rosso Portofino paint? Us too, but not for £23,976. The pop up spoiler on the back deck looks daft as it is without paying £3,919 to have it in carbon fibre. The costs are bananas: £3,214 for a front radar, £3,695 for the (admittedly excellent) Magneride dampers, £4,142 for the tinny 'premium' hi-fi.

All told this Aston is £241,000, although we do think the £10k carbon ceramics should be standard and the £15k for this Q Provenance paint looks suspiciously like Aston is learning bad habits. But overall it seems to offer significantly better value. On residuals, nearly new Roma Spiders with a few hundred miles are listing at around £220k – they're losing whatever options value they're carrying almost immediately. Year old Vantage coupes (the roadster is too new to feature) are also being listed at around their pre-options new price. On balance the Aston is probably doing a bit better, but either way you are going to be losing tens of thousands of pounds in the first year.

That Vantage coupe we rate as a 9/10 car – we love it. The hard-top Roma is a 7/10. The soft-top Ferrari is a better car than its coupe cousin, while Aston's latest roadster isn't quite as complete and well rounded as the coupe version. Which all makes this test a close run thing.

We're giving victory – as we did late last year when the Vanquish beat the 12Cilindri – to the Aston Martin, and for similar reasons. The Ferrari is the hardcore driver's choice, but is that what you want from a super roadster? More likely you just want a good time, and the Aston delivers that better. We could point to value or cabin ergonomics as reasons for the win, but as much as anything it comes down to charisma and that thumping, thunderous engine.

> “IF YOU WANT TO DRIVE HARD ON TRICKY ROADS, HAVE THE FERRARI. IN LESS TRYING CONDITIONS, THE ASTON”

# THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

SCAN HERE FOR FULL REVIEWS OF EVERY NEW CAR

## SKODA ELROQ SE L 60

**£33,350**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59 kWh | 201 bhp | 8.0 secs | 99 mph | 265 miles |

**THE ELROQ IS DESPERATELY** hard to fault. And believe us, we've tried. Basically a shrunken Enyaq, it looks tremendous, drives neatly, is efficient and roomy, balances tech and switchgear, and still dares to be cheaper than rivals. Its one weakness is that its smaller footprint hasn't unlocked any magic in the handling. Pity. The Born VZ proves the MEB platform *can* deliver... **JH**

## ABARTH 600e SCORPIONISSIMA

**£39,875**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 54 kWh | 276 bhp | 5.9 secs | 124 mph | 207 miles |

**LIKE THOSE LITTLE JARS OF** yeast extract you'll love this or hate it, but if you insist on one you should get a limited run Scorpionissima before all 1,949 are gone. Doesn't make sense unless you get the silliest fastest version. The drive is a surprise – feels like you can tip it into a corner at any speed and it'll drag you through – just a shame they had to start with such a boring donor car. **SB**

7/10

## MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53 CABRIOLET

**£79,660**

**FOR** Drop top suits boisterous character

**AGAINST** Interior tech painful, why so many drive modes?

**CAN'T JUST BE US WHO FINDS THE MERCEDES LINEUP A CONFUSING** smorgasbord these days – this is the old two-door C- and E-Class cabrios combined into one. While entry level CLEs are available with a range of 2.0-litre turbo fours, the AMG CLE 53 turns the volume up with its 3.0-litre inline straight six, complete with electric turbo and 48V starter generator for a total of 443bhp and 413lb ft of torque.

Nothing quiet about the looks either, from the polarising bonnet vent to the swollen arches to the aggressive rear diffuser. In addition to the beefier body and powertrain it gets four wheel steer, four wheel drive, adaptive dampers, a drift mode... a bit overkill? Perhaps. But it's plenty fun to drive, and what it lacks in dynamic talent it more than makes up for in character. At least, until the rumoured V8 powered CLE 63 arrives... **PR**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.0T 6cyl | 443 bhp | 4.4 secs | 29.5 mpg | 218 g/km |

5/10

## ISUZU D-MAX V-CROSS

**£40,005 (ex VAT)**

**YOU MAY NOT HAVE NOTICED,** but the D-Max was facelifted in mid-2023 with a new front grille, new wheel designs and some fresh interior fabrics. Not the most comprehensive overhaul, but if it ain't broke. It feels pretty tough too, with its 4cyl diesel and a decent 266lb ft of low down torque. You also get switchable 4WD and a locking rear diff. Just don't expect the on road manners of posh pickups. **GP**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.9TD 4cyl | 162 bhp | 13.0 secs | 31.4 mpg | 235 g/km |

6/10

## SKODA KODIAQ vRS

**£52,595**

**IT WAS ONCE THE FASTEST** seven seater around the 'Ring, and now Skoda's latest hot take packs an extra 20bhp courtesy of its EA888 2.0-litre turbo four familiar from the Golf GTI. It also gets progressive steering, 15-stage damping and faux cabin noise... all of which you already get on upper spec Kodiaqs, and none of which help it live up to the promise of that badge. It's a pass from us. **PR**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.0T 4cyl | 262 bhp | 6.4 secs | 33.3 mpg | 192 g/km |

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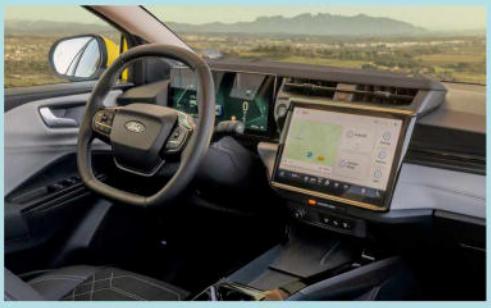
K PE 3939 E
PUMA



**7/10**

## FORD PUMA GEN-E

## £29,995

**FOR** Excellent driving characteristics, well packaged cabin, competitive price

**AGAINST** Limited range, unsettled ride, lacking in proper physical buttons

| | | 0-62 mph | vmax | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 53 kWh | 166 bhp | 8.0 secs | 99 mph | 233 miles |

**FINALLY, FORD'S ELECTRIC PUMA IS ON THE** prowl. It arrives with high hopes: the ICE version has been the bestselling car in the UK for the past two years running and leads the way in 2025 too, and it's also long been our favourite small crossover for being better to drive than it has any right to. It can thank the Fiesta (RIP) for that, the car it's based on.

So, welcome to the Ford Puma Jenny. Sorry, Gen-E. At first glance Ford's entry level EV is all very familiar, with telltale signs it's electric including the blanked off front grille and white (instead of black) Puma lettering at the rear. Subtle, at least.

Underneath, it sits on a modified version of the existing Puma's ICE platform, itself based on the seventh gen Fiesta… something that was never intended to take a big battery and all the electric gubbins that go with it. Fitting a square peg in a round hole comes with compromises, as the small battery here proves. More on that in a bit.

It's available in one sensibly powered single front e-motor version only. Ford hasn't messed with the dynamics too much, with precise and direct steering. Even carrying plenty of speed into a bend it remains flat and composed with minimal body roll. The only real let down is the slightly unsettled ride, where its extra weight shows.

But of more importance is the 233 miles of range courtesy of the 53kWh (43kWh usable) battery. We saw under 190 miles real world (4.4mpkWh) in battery friendly 20°C temps. Remember that compromise we mentioned? Electric superminis, including the Peugeot e-208 (268 miles) and Mini Cooper (247), manage more.

Inside, the Gen-E stays true to the facelifted Puma's recipe, complete with squircle steering wheel (yuck), 12.8-inch digital dials and 12.0-inch SYNC 4 infotainment system, which controls everything from the climate to the drive modes. As ever there's a severe lack of knobs and buttons, but the MegaBox (the deep rubber lined box in the boot complete with plug hole so you can hose out your mess) is present and correct, only it's now morphed into… an even bigger (523 litres) *Giga*Box. No exhaust to worry about here, see.

Prices start a whisker shy of £30,000, just under three and a half grand more than the combustion version. Ford reckons you can recoup that extra outright cost with one of those cheap overnight tariffs. It's also announced a new 'Power Promise', which amounts to a free electric home charger, 10,000 miles of charging credit, plus a five year service plan that includes towing assistance should you run out of charge. Good to know.

But three years on from when the Puma Gen-E was first announced, adapting a platform that was never meant to take a lump of a battery makes the Gen-E feel like an afterthought. And it shows with its limited range. If that's an important factor for you, forget this and go for a Kia EV3 instead. **PR**

## VAUXHALL MOKKA ELECTRIC

**£32,495**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 54 kWh | 154 bhp | 9.0 secs | 93 mph | 250 miles |

**BEING AS LATE TO THE PARTY AS THE FORD** Puma Gen-E is there's no shortage of rivals, and this is one of the key ones. It's been with us since 2021, with the 154bhp electric motor/54kWh battery/250 mile range up on the 126bhp/50kWh/201 mile setup available at launch. A new entry spec trim makes it more accessible, but the copy and paste look now shared with the rest of the range means it's no longer the standout style king it once was, and the cabin's still as dull as ever. **PR**

RV25 TVY
8/10

## PORSCHE PANAMERA TURBO S E-HYBRID

**£168,700**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.0TT V8 + e-motor | 771 bhp | 2.9 secs | 201.8 mpg | 32 g/km |

**THERE'S NOTHING ELSE QUITE LIKE THIS. IT** uses a hybridised twin turbo V8 with 771bhp so you think it's quite like a BMW M5, but it's more limo than super saloon. Like a petrol Taycan then? Nah, it's way bigger. And cleverer – the Active Ride system is witchcraft and grants the hottest Panam astonishing, uncanny road manners. Why have it though? It's ridiculous money and looks blobby. Easy: you've got an autobahn to conquer before breakfast. Nothing does it better. **OM**

K TC 3813 E
8/10

## FORD E-TRANSIT CUSTOM

**£48,340** (ex VAT)

**FOR** Usable real world range, lovely to drive (in context)

**AGAINST** It's only cost effective if you can charge at home (or the depot)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 64 kWh | 215 bhp | 7.4 secs | 80 mph | 204 miles |

**IF YOU'RE THUMBING THROUGH THIS MAG** cover to cover, you'll have read our Van Prix test on p56. Just picked this up in the shop? Then take it to the till. Anyway, while the majority of vans on the road today are still diesel powered, there's growing demand for electric variants, with battery electric vans representing 8.3 per cent of market sales year to date, up from 4.3 per cent last year. That follows seven months of consecutive growth, according to the SMMT.

And one of the best is this, the Ford e-Transit Custom. It's like for like in size with the mid-sized Transit we put through its paces in our triple test, and is available with three, five or six seats in varying lengths. Under the skin you get the choice of 134bhp or 215bhp electric motors, both paired with a 64kWh battery for a maximum 204 miles of range.

Seriously, what tradie travels further in their daily shift? Ford has done the maths and reckons that meets the requirements of 89 per cent of its van customers. And fact is, electric power suits van life. Compared to the regular Transit the electric variant is better to drive, quieter – no dirty diesel idle here – and the instant on demand torque suits lugging big loads around too. The cherry on top is that the e-Transit is exempt in low emission and congestion charge zones (for now) too.

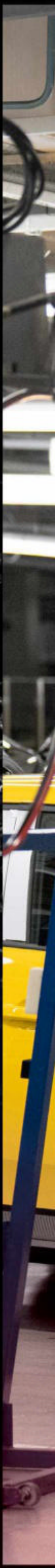
Ah yes, the elephant in the room. Price. Where the Ford Transit Custom diesel starts from £34,215 (ex VAT), the e-Transit Custom starts from £44,900, or £48,340 with the more powerful motor as driven here, both again before HMRC has slapped on its markup. But wait, because you can immediately knock £5k off thanks to the government's plug-in van grant (PiVG), and the big initial purchase price is softened further by it being way cheaper to run on electricity per mile – provided you take advantage of off peak tariffs and never use public chargers, you're looking at £6 to rejuice.

Ford also reckons the e-Transit Custom is around 40 per cent cheaper to service, thanks to fewer moving parts, and every e-Transit gets an eight year/100,000 mile battery warranty for peace of mind. You're also likely looking at better residuals. Suddenly going electric starts to make plenty of financial sense to fleet managers looking to upgrade. **PR**

# GARAGE

INCLUDING

**HONDA CIVIC TYPE R · PEUGEOT 3008 · LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130 · RICCI'S GARAGE · ASTON MARTIN DB12 · MG CYBERSTER · BMW M135 · DACIA DUSTER · BMW M5 · POLESTAR 3 · RENAULT 5**



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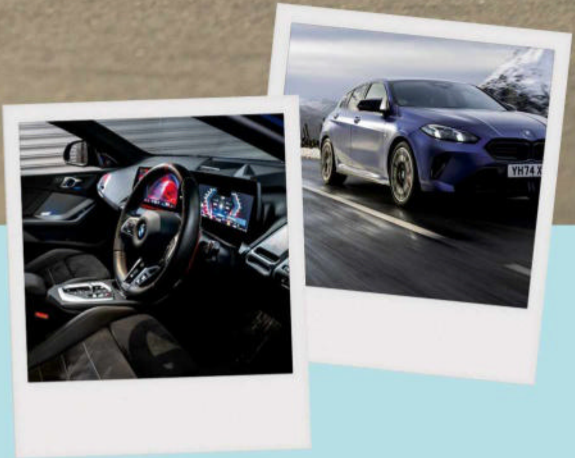
# "The void the M135 has left is, well, infinitesimal"



## BMW M135

**£43,740 OTR/£54,050 as tested/£602 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:** It's about time BMW had a hot hatch worthy of the M badge again

**DRIVER:** *Jethro Bovingdon*

**THE M135 LEFT ME QUITE** unexpectedly. It was planned, it's just the admin part of my brain is about as large as a grain of rice and so I'd forgotten the exact day that it was going back. Therefore, I never got one final drive to remember it by. I wasn't even home.

The void it has left is, well, infinitesimal. Was it blue? Yes, I think it was blue. Looked pretty cool, actually. Any other lasting memories? The 2.0-litre turbocharged four delivered the goods but sounded slightly strained and very tuneless. The dual clutch gearbox could be a bit jerky in low speed manoeuvres but I enjoyed its speed and sharpness. And the chassis was fantastically surefooted but almost bereft of entertainment. The M135 is a car of broad capabilities but barely an ounce of real, proper enthusiasm.

Perhaps I'm being harsh. But that magic 'M' means a lot to me and when applied to a decently compact hot hatch with 300bhp, 295lb ft and 4WD it should signify something special: an aggressive, highly charged driving experience with fluid dynamics and that trademark BMW balance. Instead, the M135 is just OK. Memorable more for the promise and the lovely, high quality interior than those moments when the road opens out and tempts you into having fun.

The cynics will say that the badge, the straight line performance and the usability are enough. Well, maybe. Yet when priced at £54,050 as tested, my own feeling is that the M135 should be so much more. In pure excitement terms it's miles behind the Honda Civic Type R benchmark (see opposite) yet the more 'rounded' approach doesn't mean great ride quality and refinement. The M135 falls instead into a no man's land with the compromises of hot hatch status in terms of comfort, but very little of the reward.

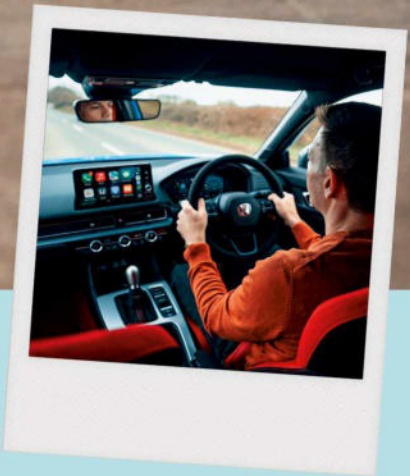
### SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 1998cc turbo 4cyl, AWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 296bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.9secs, 155mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,550kg
**ECONOMY:** 36.7mpg, 175g/km $CO_2$

MILES SO FAR 6,126 OUR MPG 34.7

HELLO

“My guess is that the Type R’s purity won’t hurt its daily appeal”



## HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

**£51,905 OTR/£52,605 as tested/£777 pcm**

**WHY IT’S HERE:** To find out if any front drive hot hatch can be worth £51,905

**DRIVER:** *Jethro Bovingdon*

**SOME CARS FEEL RIGHT WITHIN** about a hundred metres. The polish of their controls, the way suspension perfectly deals with the surface beneath and the accuracy of their steering makes all seem right with the world almost immediately. Our new Civic Type R goes one better. Forget the hundred metre test, the Type R feels right as soon as you drop into the bright red driver’s seat and clasp the cool to the touch aluminium shifter for the six speed box. Something about the driving position and the simplicity of it all says instinctively that you’re in for a very good time.

Of course, we already know the Type R is brilliant. It destroyed the ‘competition’ in our recent hot hatch test and really goes beyond the usual brief. It feels like a ground up sports car rather than a hatchback with some killer bits thrown into the mix. So, this long term test is really intended to discover if that pure sports car feel gets wearing in everyday use. The ride is pretty tough. The manual gearbox is a thing of beauty but will we be craving a dual clutch auto after a stint on the M25? Especially with the ‘new for this generation’ lighter flywheel that gives even greater engine response but might just make trundling to the local shops a little bit lumpy.

My guess, right now, is that the Type R’s purity won’t hurt its daily appeal at all. So many cars seem to mistake breadth of ability with an across the board averageness that the Honda’s determination to be sharp, agile and exciting creates a sense of occasion that far outweighs any compromises. So far, aside from the fact I can’t turn off the speed limit warning chime, I’m loving pretty much everything about this thing. And in Racing Blue Pearl (the only extra at £700) it looks stunning.

### SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 1996cc turbo 4cyl, FWD

**PERFORMANCE:** 315bhp, 310lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.4secs, 171mph

**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,429kg

**ECONOMY:** 34.4mpg, 186g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR** 1,990 **OUR MPG** 29.8

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REPORT 5

# DACIA DUSTER

**£25,945 OTR/£26,595 as tested/£128 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**
The Duster now looks funky and has gone hybrid: still a budget hero?

**DRIVER:** *CHARLIE ROSE*

**WITH OUR FULL HYBRID DUSTER** away this month to have the Sleep Pack fitted (more on that next time), I've been handed a replacement: a mild hybrid Duster TCe 130 4x4 in Extreme trim.

Straight away, the contrast is clear. Around town, the full hybrid has the edge. The 4x4 feels more basic, but where it starts to shine is when things get more adventurous. This version gets a drive mode selector with settings for Snow, Sand/Mud, a 4WD Lock mode, and hill descent control, plus some helpful screen graphics showing incline angle and power distribution.

As tested, this 4x4 Extreme and our 2WD full hybrid Journey both cost £26,595. They're aimed at very different use cases: the 4x4 is more fun and definitely feels like the one you'd want on a camping trip. The hybrid, on the other hand, is a better companion for the weekly shop or urban commuting.

If you want the best of both worlds, there's talk of a full hybrid 4x4 coming later this year with an electrified rear axle. That would be the sweet spot, though it'll almost certainly be the priciest Duster yet.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 1598cc turbo 4cyl hybrid, FWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 139bhp, 109lb ft, 0–62mph in 9.8secs, 106mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,380kg
**ECONOMY:** 56.5mpg, 114g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR** 5,110 **OUR MPG** 55.5

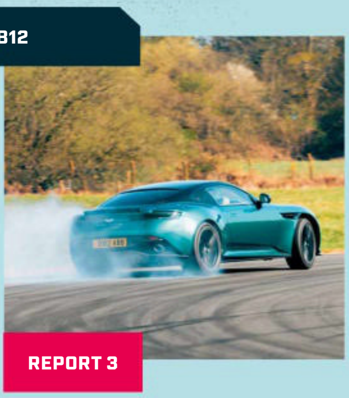
ASTON MARTIN DB12

After dumping Pirelli, Aston's now in bed with Michelin. Look out for bespoke 'AML' rubber

Dunsfold's runway: 1.04 miles. DB12 top speed: 202mph. Bravery? Optional. New pants? Recommended

It may not sound the best, but drifting a Werther's Original still puts a smile on your face

To keep itself cool, DB12 packs triple the radiators and bigger wheelarch liners over DB11



REPORT 3

# ASTON MARTIN DB12

**£185,000/£240,000/£1,849**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**
Aston's GTs are increasingly sporty: too much for the daily grind?

**DRIVER:** *ROWAN HORNCASTLE*

**IT FEELS FAINTLY ABSURD,** sliding a £240k car around a race circuit while lounging in a tub of handstitched caramel leather. But then, Aston has declared the DB12 the first 'Super Tourer', so to the *TopGear* test track I went.

And anyone who has seen a James Bond film knows that Astons look fantastic on the limit. And the DB12 is no different. It feels kinda right, as the funny little vertical popup spoiler shows its face and the rear tyres start smoking. And those tyres are special – as, after many years with Pirelli, the DB12 is on Michelins.

But the DB12 isn't a natural track car – it's too refined. Even with 671bhp it's not as explosive, direct or characterful a V8 as it is in various hot Mercs. Or even its smaller sibling, the Vantage. In that car the same engine is rampant and tuned to be angrier.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 3982cc twin turbo V8, RWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 671bhp, 590lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.6secs, 202mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,685kg
**ECONOMY:** 23.2mpg, 278g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR** 6,231 **OUR MPG** 23.2

HELLO

# "When did a sub-£30k car last create this much hype?"

## RENAULT 5

**£26,995 OTR/£27,795 as tested/£221 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**

It's the toughest test for *TG*'s 2024 Car of the Year: daily life

**DRIVER:** GREG POTTS

**WELL, THIS IS RATHER EXCITING.** Welcome to Renault's Douai factory in northern France, and more importantly, welcome to *TG*'s very own Renault 5. Yep, we're embarking on life with the retro little city car to see whether it can justify its *TopGear* Car of the Year win over a long term, real world test. It was also crowned World Car of the Year for 2025, but obviously the *TG* award means much more.

Seriously though, when was the last time a sub-£30,000 car created this much hype? So far, the Renault seems to have backed up its glorious throwback design with competitive pricing and a more than adequate drive, but time on the *TG* fleet will be its toughest test yet.

So, to its birthplace. This is the factory that produced the original 5 between 1974 and 1984, but the square footage has shrunk in recent years as Renault sells off land and looks to make it more efficient and cost effective. It now builds the new 5 and its rowdier Alpine A290 sibling and the larger Megane and Scenic here, with Renault's EV offshoot company Ampere referring to this more nimble plant – plus the new battery gigafactory across the road – as its 'ElectriCity'. Sigh.

A quick peak behind the scenes would suggest that demand for the 5 is high right now, and it looks like we're not the only ones who wanted it in Yellow Pop! (Renault's exclamation, not ours) paint. We're told that Midnight Blue is currently the most popular colour in France, but from the look of the line on the day we collected our car, customers aren't shying away from yellow or green. This is good news – the 5's chunky stance and cutesy cartoon face certainly suit a brighter shade.

And yet, I'm naturally a bit of a sceptic, so despite the awards it has picked up so far, the 5 will have its work cut out to win me over. First up, a 200-mile trip to get back home to London...

### SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** single electric motor, 52kWh battery, FWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 148bhp, 181lb ft, 0–62mph in 7.9secs, 93mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,450kg
**ECONOMY:** 4.8mpkWh, 251 miles

**MILES SO FAR** 672 **OUR MPKWH** 4.1

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## LAND ROVER DEFENDER 130

**£115,435 OTR/£117,375 as tested/£1,784 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**
Is the biggest Defender the best?

**DRIVER:** *JACK RIX*

**THIS MONTH WE WAVE A TEARFUL** goodbye to the car that may have ruined me forever, but first a farewell roadtrip to the French Alps for a week's skiing.

The joy of lobbing everything in the back, rather than carefully packing four suitcases, will never grow old. Once in France, a three minute drive to the ski lift each morning meant skis were lobbed in the back – again no roof rack faff required. As for costs there and back – we drove 1,252 miles at 19.3mpg and filled up four times costing €490 in total. Factor in tolls and Le Shuttle and we're talking €750. Clearly a smaller car could bring this down a fair bit, but still cheaper than flights for four plus car hire/transfers.

A timely encapsulation then of why I've fallen for the Defender 130 so hard – and why I'm still surprised it only accounts for 10 per cent of UK Defender sales. There wasn't a box that it didn't tick – more bootspace than you could realistically need, always seats to spare, easy to operate, faultlessly reliable during our seven months together (shocker, I know), the V8 adds a bit of naughtiness, and when it's needed to look after us off road it's got capability by the dumpster load. If I was only allowed to drive one car for the rest of my life – something that had to cover every single base – this would be in with a shout.

### SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 5000cc supercharged V8, AWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 493bhp, 450lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.4secs, 149mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 2,670kg
**ECONOMY:** 19.6mpg, 325g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR 8,278 OUR MPG 19.6**

**REPORT 6**

## CITROEN e-SPACE TOURER

**£54,375 OTR/£56,960 as tested/£469 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**
Is a giant battery powered MPV really a good idea?

**DRIVER:** *SAM PHILIP*

**CRACK OUT THE SPANNERS! ONE INNOCENT TUESDAY** morning, I fire up the e-SpaceTourer to be confronted by… nothing. Actually, it starts up, it moves, but its screens – both digital dash and central infotainment display – are absolutely dead. Not a flicker.

This is less than ideal. The e-SpaceTourer boasts no physical dials, meaning that, yes, I can technically drive the thing, but with no idea how fast I'm going, or how much charge I've got left. I'm several hundred miles from home. Suboptimal.

I call Citroen. Citroen suggests disconnecting and reconnecting the 12V battery (yep, despite boasting monster 400V-plus power packs for motivation, EVs retain old school 12Vs to run their auxiliary electrics). I am sceptical.

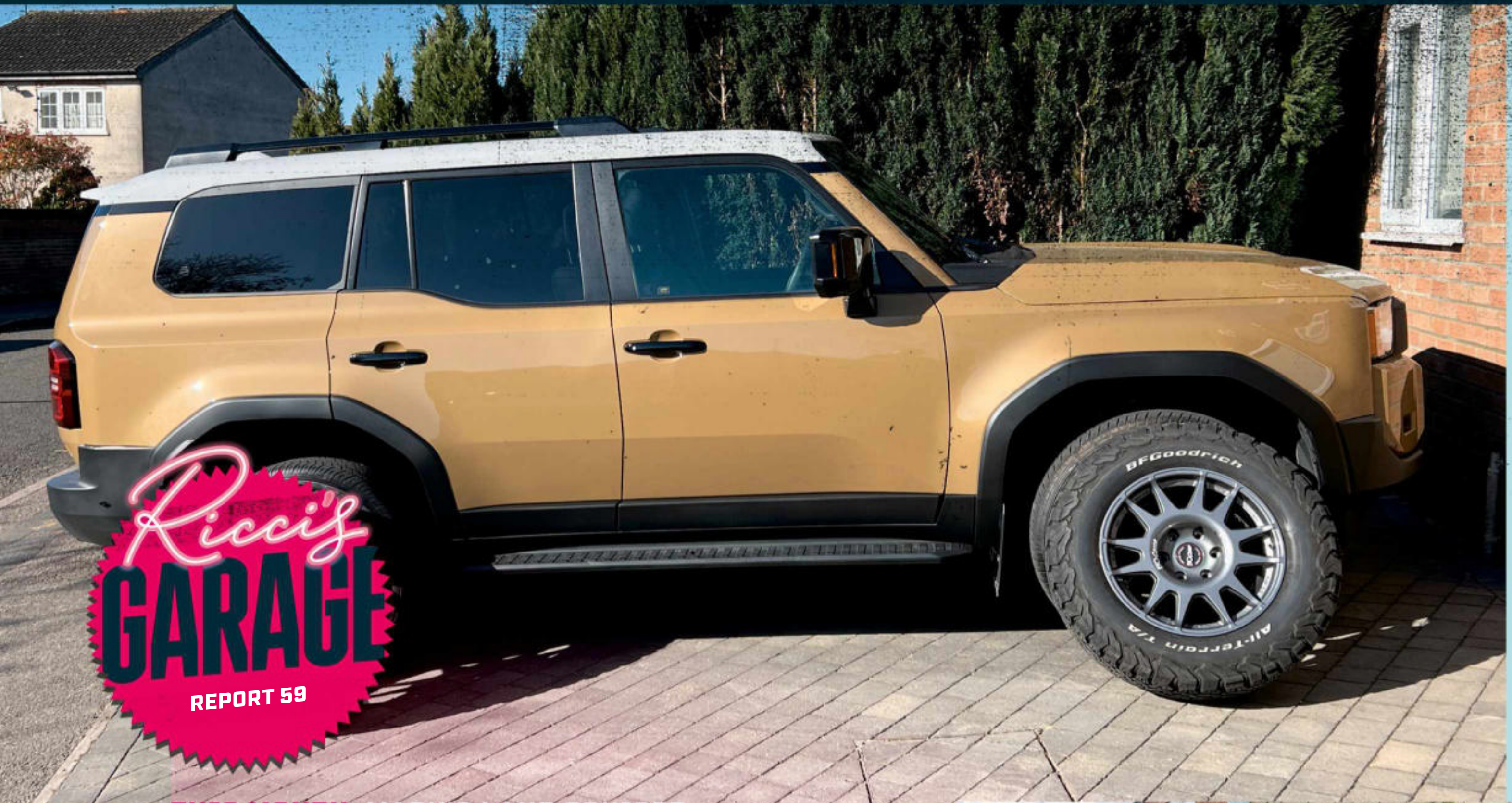
Pop bonnet, loosen 10mm bolt, disconnect terminal, wait 15 minutes, reconnect terminal and… yes, after a disconcerting reboot process strewn with mad error messages, everything returns to normal. The old 'tried turning it off and on again?' trick.

Disconcerting it conked out? Or reassuring it can be fixed with an actual spanner? I can't decide. Either way, I'm travelling with a toolkit from now on.

### SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** single electric motor, 75kWh battery, FWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 134bhp, 221lb ft, 0–62mph in 13.1 secs, 81mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 2,136kg
**ECONOMY:** 3.2mpkWh, 221 miles

**MILES SO FAR 1,230 OUR MPKWH 1.2**



# Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 59

**THIS MONTH:** MARK'S LAND CRUISER GETS A NEW SET OF WHEELS AND TYRES

This was supposed to be a very straightforward Ricci's Garage update on fitting another set of off-road wheels to my Land Cruiser, but as you can see by the images on this page, only a single wheel has been attempted so far. Thankfully this page doesn't support audio, or the rather colourful language that accompanied it would see *TopGear* placed in a black bag and stocked alongside the remaining bongo mags. Annoyingly, all of this frustration could've been easily avoided had I decided to read any of the 'for sale' advert on eBay. Instead, I decided to employ the immediate excitement approach, glancing over the sizes and hitting buy it now before worrying about any of the boring stuff.

The first red flag should've been the fact the images showed them fitted to a Ford Ranger. A very quick Google showed that Rangers have a PCD (the number of wheel bolts and space between them) of 6x139, which is the same as the new 250 Land Cruiser. What I didn't research was the centre bore size (the hole in the back of the wheel which sits onto the hub), and it turns out Ford Rangers have a much smaller centre bore than Land Cruisers. This was only researched upon fitting the first wheel, and the immediate rage of realising this was likely on par with having Cycling Mikey tap on your window. Especially when it turns out they look properly cool.

What you're looking at is a set of 18x8.5in Evo Corse Dakar wheels – a design which is unsurprisingly used in many heavy duty motorsports like rallying and Dakar. They're even used on the winning Toyota Hilux, albeit with the correct centre bore dimensions I'd assume. What I love about these wheels is they're brilliantly rugged and give a properly purposeful look to any car, especially when matched with a chunky off road tyre that'll sound like a swarm of bees following you as you drive up and down the M1. Evo Corse does make Land Cruiser-fitment wheels – in fact it can produce just about every offset and size imaginable – but my impatience and excitement for a bargain meant I'd gambled on these Ranger wheels instead.

Now one option to get them to fit would be to run adapters which allow a different centre bore size on either end. This would be very quick and easy, if it wasn't for the fact the offset was already too aggressive and any additional spacing will make the Land Cruiser look like a very odd 1930s hot rod. The other is to machine the centre bores larger, and after a quick chat with Craig Taylor of Dyno Torque – a man who has previously saved my bacon many times while fixing my Pajero Evolution – that's exactly what we're going to do. There shouldn't be any downsides to this in terms of strength or stiffness as the size increase is only a few millimetres, and if I were sensible, I'd put some more road friendly tyres on instead. But clearly that's not going to happen because I'm an idiot, but in a few days' time we can all pretend this little mishap never happened in the first place. Until the next one.

***Renowned photographer Mark has been working with* TopGear *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world***

**GOODBYE**

# “The 3008 makes any long trip seem like a short one”

## PEUGEOT 3008

**£38,535 OTR/£39,135 as tested/£360 pcm**

**WHY IT’S HERE:**

**Is the striking looking Peugeot 3008 a style-over-substance crossover?**

**DRIVER:** ESTHER NEVE

**IN HONOUR OF OUR PEUGEOT’S** nationality, for its goodbye from *TopGear* it seemed only fitting to take it on a trip under the Channel to la belle France. Not only would this be a further test of its roadtrip credentials, but also of its comfort, spaciousness and economy.

I have said before that the 3008 makes any long trip seem like a short one – even a trip blighted by traffic jams. Again this sentiment was underlined on my journey down through the Home Counties and around the interminable M25 to the Le Shuttle terminal in Kent. Yes, I can’t deny that there was a moment of discomfort and panic… but that was as I approached customs, and beyond the remit of the Peugeot. Formalities sorted, I stocked up on lunch at the Flexiplus lounge (which they expect you to eat in your car) and was soon on my way under the sea.

Now, eating in cars is not something I approve of – we all know how crumbs and crisp dust can make a home in the most annoying crevices – but the design of the 3008’s seats meant brushing away the post-lunch detritus was a simple matter of hand sweeping the seat clean. Happy days.

So far, so good. Off Le Shuttle and onto the autoroute for a blast down to Boulogne-sur-Mer watching out for speed cameras and the Gendarmerie nationale. What is immediately obvious is that French road surfaces are soooo much better than British roads. The cabin noise is minimal – not something that had previously bothered me, but now I know how quiet roads can be, I want it all the time. And the ride is super smooth. The drivers, yes, have more, um, *flair* (especially the Belgians) but the roads are so quiet it’s easy to cope with the odd bit of flamboyant driving. I might have to investigate relocating *TG* to France! Ha, if only!

Another happy consequence of these smooth roads was the continuation of the Peugeot’s surprisingly good economy – 47mpg on the run down through France. And I am not a dithery and diffident driver. Seems the home country is really inspiring the 3008 to go the extra mile and do its best to impress… which is great, but I was already impressed beforehand on rubbish British roads.

Arrival in Boulogne-sur-Mer comes quickly – it’s really not so far from Calais as you’d imagine, half an hour to 40mins and you’re there… TBH, makes me wonder why I don’t do more trips across the Channel, for me, it’s easier and quicker to get to a French or Belgian seaside town than to go on a weekend break in Yorkshire or Cumbria – so I park up in the hotel car park and go for a wander around the town. In case you’re wondering, it’s well worth a visit. Amazing castle, great

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merci de votre visite
cité
europe

Quick bit of shopping to try to fill the 3008's capacious boot. More wine!

Hôtel
HÔTEL DE LA MATELOTE

cathedral, huge ramparts to walk along, plenty of wine merchants… which will help me test the boot capacity on the way home.

The journey home is punctuated by a trip up the French coast and into Belgium with a stay in Ypres – another beautiful town. Then back to Cité Europe for a quick shopping excursion (yes, more wine) and off to Le Shuttle for a smooth and easy crossing home. And the 3008 doesn't put a foot wrong the entire time, in fact it hasn't the entire time it's been with us.

Which brings me to the question posed at the top of this and every report on the Peugeot… *Is the striking looking Peugeot 3008 a style-over-substance crossover?* Initially, I know some people thought it wouldn't stack up, that it would be a disappointment, but the simple facts speak for themselves – it is stylish (no denying it) but offers a lot more than that and has made driving of all varieties (city, m'way, B-roads) a pleasure by being comfortable, roomy and economical. Good job.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 1199cc 3cyl turbo, FWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 138bhp, 170lb ft, 0–62mph in 10.2secs, 125mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,573kg
**ECONOMY:** 44.6mpg, 124g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR** 6,300 **OUR MPG** 47.0

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**REPORT 3**

# "A run up to Arc 2000 proves it knows how to be an M5"

## BMW M5 TOURING

**£114,015 OTR/£135,058 as tested/£1,560 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**

Furiously complex, huge and heavy – is the M5 headed in the right direction?

**DRIVER:** OLLIE MARRIAGE

**THE X FACTOR. THAT INTANGIBLE** something that elevates the ordinary into the exceptional. Could that be something as simple as adding a boot to the back of the M5? Ah, you thought I was going to liken the M5 Touring to an unstoppable TV juggernaut? Let's not be too hasty – it's only just got here.

Yep, the Fire Red saloon has been swapped for an Isle of Man Green estate, and the previous report's backdrop of a small house in Wales is now a big mountain in the Alps. Like the saloon, the estate doesn't settle properly in the UK. The ride fidgets, the car often feels tense. Get into France and... ah, that's better.

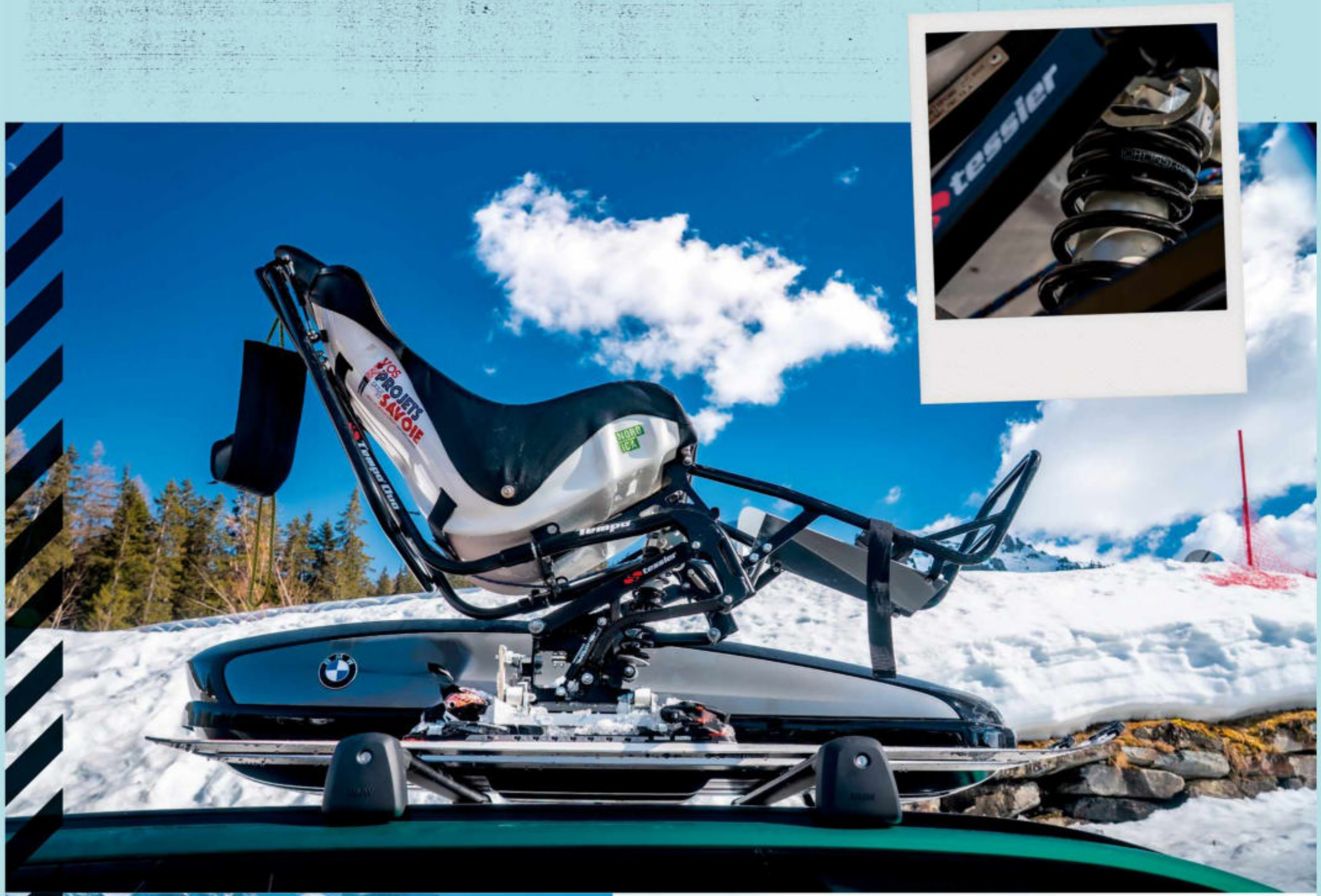
The suspension settles, it falls silent, distances are soaked up. Less a comment on the M5, than the parlous state of our roads. Not very M5, talking about refinement, is it? Nor economy, but here goes. I didn't recharge en route. Because why would you when there's a twin turbo V8 to do the heavy lifting? With a roofbox on it did 23.9mpg over 1,600 miles. Big fall from the 36–42mpg it gets if I plug in at home to refill the 18.6kWh battery.

In the mountains, I discovered two things. The M5 fits through tucked away French villages just as well as it fits through walled Welsh towns. You drive everywhere with a pre-prepped wince on your face.

But just as I'd been wondering what the M5 offered over a 530e, an opportunity. A fast run up to Arc 2000 to collect a sitski (more on that in a sec). Lovely weather, wide enough road up from Bourg St Maurice and all the torque I could wish for. And most of the grip. Turns out Hankook winter tyres turn a bit squidgy with 2.5 tonnes pressing down on them and unseasonably warm Easter temperatures.

This generation of M5 hides its light under a bushel more than previous ones, does less to encourage fun driving, but get the modes ramped up and it's there for you. The 4WD Sport setting is brilliant, sending torque rearwards for amusing hairpin exits, while maintaining forward momentum. Hero mode. Electric is there for instant throttle response, but it's not enough. More e-shove is needed. You can't just leave it in third for hairpins and rely on electric torque

WITH THANKS TO LES_ARCS_HANDISKI ON INSTAGRAM, SCOTT-SPORTS.COM



and response to pull you out, you have to use all of the V8 as well. No hardship.

But this one drive was revealing. There's still an M5 tucked away in here. And emptied of luggage (you can't hear skis being thrown around in a roof box), it'll have Jean-Claude in his hot Clio puffing to keep up.

What the M5 doesn't have – more's the pity – is Öhlins dampers. The Tessier sitski does. It's a skiing wheelchair, designed to give disabled people access to the mountain. My 16 year old niece Chloe has cerebral palsy but has never let it hold her back. She has a Bear Grylls level sense of adventure. The sitski opens up a whole new world to her. So I, plus my wife and bro, spent a week learning to be sitski pilots.

Imagine trying to take a shopping trolley down a mountain. One filled with a cargo just slightly more valuable than milk, sausages, fruit and cereal. As much as the technique required, it's the sense of responsibility. You want your passenger to have fun, but having a crash doesn't bear thinking about. And then there's the getting it on and off lifts. We ended each day utterly spent.

As a result I was dreading the one hit 750 mile slog back. Would have rather liked to be bundled into the back of a Range Rover and make it someone else's problem, but I'll say this for the M5: purring V8 and distantly rumbling tyres are actually quite a soothing combination. Plus BMW has the best lane keep system out there. Not only accurate, but calm and confident. No sudden moves, just enough assistance to give you a helping hand without interfering.

I feel better about this M5 already. The Touring body suits it. Maybe it's because you make allowances for an estate that you don't for a saloon. More likely it's that estates are inherently cooler.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** 4395cc TT V8 + e-motor, AWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 717bhp, 737lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.5secs, 155mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 2,475kg
**ECONOMY:** 176.6mpg, 34g/km $CO_2$

**MILES SO FAR** 3,154 **OUR MPG** 23.9

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HELLO

# POLESTAR 3

**£81,500 OTR/£93,800 as tested/£879 pcm**

**WHY IT'S HERE:**
Is the designery Polestar 3 an EV with real character?
**DRIVER:** *Jason Barlow*

**THIS IS A CRUCIAL CAR FOR** Polestar, beset with rivals and cooling enthusiasm for EVs. The power and torque outputs are at least out of the 'recently good enough for a supercar' drawer, though. Good start. The extra grunt hurts the range a bit, reducing it to 348 miles (WLTP) from 390. Real world, we're looking at around 300, especially as the weather warms up.

Then there are the options. The interior is finished in Nappa leather, with black ash deco on the dash. This is responsibly sourced, and costs £5,000. I could live without the £2,300 Pilot pack that adds various bits of ADAS. But the Plus pack is a no brainer for a music obsessed audiophile like me, given that it brings with it the Bowers & Wilkins upgrade. This is a 1,610W 25 speaker powerhouse, with front headrest speakers, Dolby Atmos 3D surround sound and soon an OTA update that'll add the spectacular Abbey Road sound stage. More on that soon. The Plus pack also includes active noise cancellation, acoustic glass and heated seats. Metallic paint, HD LED headlights and 22in polished black alloys round the options tally to £12,300.

A £94k car from a company that only started eight years ago. Startup brands have an allure, for sure – so far the 3 is immaculate.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** two e-motors, 111kWh battery, AWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 510bhp, 671lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.5secs, 130mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 2,584kg
**ECONOMY:** 3.1mpkWh, 348 miles

**MILES SO FAR** 357 **OUR MPKWH** 3.0

## WHAT ELSE WE'RE RUNNING

REPORT 2

### SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

This week, I've been scurrilously accused of being 'sponsored by Skoda' after a mere couple of mentions about how good the Superb combi is at real life. The truth is in just 3k miles, I've found that the Superb Estate does everything I need it to. My dog Frank loves it, the kids love it, even my aged parents love it. *TF*

REPORT 2

### PORSCHE MACAN

Despite having 2.4 tonnes to shift, with its battery weight down low, over 800lb ft, 400mm front brakes and the optional RWS, the Macan stops, goes and steers like few other SUVs out there. It's our reigning Performance SUV of the Year for a reason. No wonder I'm barely topping 2mpkWh. *BP*

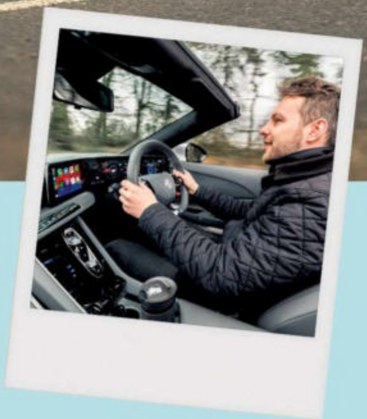
REPORT 2

### CUPRA TAVASCAN

I've been exposed to plenty more electrified Chinese crossovers lately, including *TopGear*'s gathering of Chinese made cars, and if you think electrified crossovers are all the same those events would have supported your view. At least the Cupra looks and feels different. *PH*

REPORT 3

# “There is a side that’s hilariously good fun”



## MG CYBERSTER

**£54,995 OTR/£55,540 as tested/£970 pcm**

**WHY IT’S HERE:** Because it’s quite simply the only purely electric sports car in the world (for now…)

**DRIVER:** OLLIE KEW

**WHAT EVEN IS A ‘SPORTS CAR’? I** only ask because most of the cars that fit the accepted street definition aren’t in fact sporty at all.

Traditionally, a sports car was low to the ground, had two doors, two seats and probably an open roof. It had a powerful engine. And its top priority was driving dynamics. That’s as close as you’ll get to a quantifiable declaration.

So, the Cyberster. It’s got skin in the game here: the MGB, MGF and MG SV were all sports cars, of varying sorts. Does it do the business?

It’s a mixed bag when it comes to handling. Plenty of urgency, an extremely doughy chassis, and not much sensation through the controls to leave you relishing a B road hoon. Not a sports car, then.

And yet… there is a side to this car that’s unexpectedly, hilariously good fun. And it’s surprisingly easy to access. Just find a quiet, slightly greasy lane, delve into the central touchscreen, and turn off the ESP.

This is old school ESP, just as the beardy MG folk would like it. No halfway house ‘dynamic plus’ setting here. Turn it off with a swipe, and then you’re on your own immediately. Sort of.

It behaves like one of those clueless Merc systems from the 1990s. It’s fully off, until it realises to its horror you’re about to have a plane crash. So it kills the power completely. With practice, you can trick the Cyberster into adopting some fairly silly angles before the electronic killjoys gather everything back up into a straight line. And the burnouts are spectacular.

I’ve resisted temptation to make ‘ESP off’ part of my daily startup routine, along with the lane keep assist and speed bong deactivation. Not because it’s not fun. I just can’t afford to chew through each of the £250 Pirelli P-Zero ‘Elect’ EV-specialised rear tyres as quickly as all that instant torque will let me.

## SPECS

**POWERTRAIN:** single electric motor, 74kWh battery, RWD
**PERFORMANCE:** 335bhp, 350lb ft, 0–62mph in 5.0secs, 121mph
**KERBWEIGHT:** 1,885kg
**ECONOMY:** 4.2mpkWh, 316 miles

**MILES SO FAR 7,745 OUR MPKWH 2.9**

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# THE HOT LIST

## CITY CARS

**TG TIP**
Entry level **Red** trim is all the Panda you really need – and it comes on cool white steel wheels

1

### FIAT GRANDE PANDA

**PRICE: £20,975–£23,975**

**The Panda was distinctly endangered for a while there (though you can still buy the old petrol one in Italy), but it's been given a new lease of life with an electric powertrain. It's cheap, sure, but it's really well thought out and plenty stylish**

**Aimed at: dolce vitas**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...**

2

### KIA PICANTO

**PRICE: £16,065–£19,615**

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has really evolved over its three generations. The latest version is stylish and surprisingly well kitted out too

**Aimed at: learners**

3

### DACIA SPRING

**PRICE: £14,995–£16,995**

This is the cheapest electric car on sale, and despite the low price you get a whole lot for your money. It's efficient, but 140 miles won't be enough for some

**Aimed at: frugalists**

4

### HYUNDAI INSTER

**PRICE: £23,505–£28,755**

This is the car for people who want to downsize from something bigger but don't want to sacrifice any of the kit. Check out the sliding rear seats for instance

**Aimed at: techheads**

5

### FIAT 500e

**PRICE: £24,975–£33,975**

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

**Aimed at: millennials**

## SUPERMINIS

**TG TIP**
**Techno** trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all rounder and starts at £27k

1

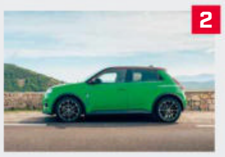
### RENAULT 4

**PRICE: £26,995–£27,995**

**This is the Renault 4 (Luca de Meo's version), a modish small SUV with a retro jacket on that offers a smidge more practicality than the smaller 5 hatch. It's also our reigning EV of the Year. Vive la France!**

**Aimed at: young French farmers**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...**



2

### RENAULT 5

**PRICE: £22,995–£29,995**

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5.

**Aimed at: retrospectives**

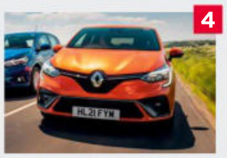
3

### SUZUKI SWIFT

**PRICE: £19,699–£22,049**

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

**Aimed at: bargain hunters**



4

### RENAULT CLIO

**PRICE: £18,995–£25,095**

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

**Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille***

5

### MINI COOPER

**PRICE: £25,265–£34,905**

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

**Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents**

## FAMILY HATCHBACKS

**TG TIP**
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

### HONDA CIVIC

**PRICE: £35,780–£40,680**

**The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one… This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades**

**Aimed at: spreadsheet users**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE…**

2

### SKODA OCTAVIA

**PRICE: £27,610–£41,070**

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

**Aimed at: people with sensible shoes**

3

### VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

**PRICE: £28,010–£46,910**

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

**Aimed at: everyone**

4

### MG4

**PRICE: £26,995–£36,495**

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

**Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers**

5

### RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

**PRICE: £33,995–£37,995**

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

**Aimed at: stylish school runs**

## BEST FAST LUXURY SALOON

### MERCEDES-AMG S63

**PRICE: from £193,525**

**Are there any cars that can quite so effortlessly span the yawning chasm between performance and luxury in the way that the S63 does? Its 3.3 second 0–62mph time is enough to make your eyes water, but it'll still cruise along smoothly like few other cars. Bit pricy though…**

**Aimed at: autobahns**

## HOT HATCHES

**TG TIP**
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is…

1

### HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £51,905

**Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliantly fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete**

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE…

2

### TOYOTA GR YARIS

**PRICE: £46,045–£61,750**

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. The first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

**Aimed at: cognoscenti**

3

### FORD FOCUS ST

**PRICE: £38,800–£44,000**

Practically Jurassic these days, but with a top notch drive this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go, particularly in ST Edition spec

**Aimed at: budget purists**

4

### AUDI S3

**PRICE: £48,650–£54,125**

The S3 got much better when Audi chucked in the RS3's trick rear diff at the last facelift – this mature all-rounder parties hard but likes a bit of hummus

**Aimed at: single car households**

5

### HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

**PRICE: £65,010**

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts – on the road

**Aimed at: gamers**

## CROSSOVERS

**TG TIP**
Entry level **Air** trim comes pretty well equipped – just go for the bigger battery

1

### KIA EV3

PRICE: £33,005–£43,905

**The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too**

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE…

2

### DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £19,380–£27,330

**If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation**

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

### VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £33,060–£47,060

**The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it**

Aimed at: stylish families

4

### FORD PUMA

PRICE: £26,580–£33,880

**The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one**

Aimed at: everyone

5

### HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,735–£33,43E5

**Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters**

Aimed at: number crunchers

## LUXURY SUVs

**TG TIP**
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

1

### RANGE ROVER

**PRICE: £105,675–£174,345**

**Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow**

**Aimed at: cash buyers**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...**

2

### VOLVO EX90

**PRICE: £82,660–£99,960**

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

**Aimed at: polo necks**

3

### FERRARI PUROSANGUE

**PRICE: £313,360**

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

**Aimed at: posers**

4

### ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

**PRICE: £298,800–£342,600**

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

**Aimed at: old money**

5

### BMW iX

**PRICE: £75,315–£114,215**

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

**Aimed at: tech VPs**

## OFF ROADERS

**TG TIP**
Just two trims here – pricier **First Edition** is the only way to get round headlights

1

### LAND CRUISER

**PRICE: £77,845**

**The Toyota was always peerless off road, but it had everything except kerbside appeal – until this stylish retro version arrived. It might be criminal to watch a pedigree rockhopper waste away on the school run, but it gets slippery in Richmond sometimes**

**Aimed at: peacekeepers**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...**

2

### LAND ROVER DEFENDER

**PRICE: £59,960–£163,545**

Everyone had an opinion about the classic Defender, but no one was buying. Now it's selling at 10x the rate and the full fat OCTA takes it further than ever

**Aimed at: school run mums**

3

### MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

**PRICE: £141,065–£208,375**

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

**Aimed at: original gangsters**

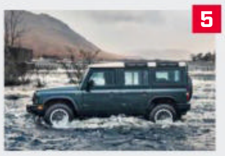
4

### FORD RANGER

**PRICE: £35,130–£57,360**

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

**Aimed at: sole traders**



5

### INEOS GRENADIER

**PRICE: £65,015–£81,782**

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

**Aimed at: old rich men**

## SPORTS CARS

**TG TIP**
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior

1

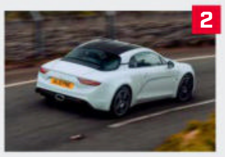
### PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £103,700–£144,400

**The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option**

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

### ALPINE A110

**PRICE: £55,160–£92,170**

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

**Aimed at: lightweights**

3

### TOYOTA GR86

**PRICE: £32,495**

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

**Aimed at: purists**

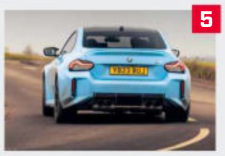
4

### PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GTS

**PRICE: £75,300**

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

**Aimed at: B-road blasters**



5

### BMW M2

**PRICE: £68,705**

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

**Aimed at: wealthier purists**

## SUPERCARS

**TG TIP**
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

### McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £252,260

**Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...**

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

### FERRARI 296 GTB

**PRICE: £241,550**

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

**Aimed at: self-made business people**

3

### LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

**PRICE: £452,040**

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

**Aimed at: high rollers**

4

### PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

**PRICE: £192,600**

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

**Aimed at: amateur racers**

5

### McLAREN ARTURA

**PRICE: £189,200**

The conservative exterior serves to hide some big developments under the skin – ssh, but the Artura might even be a better daily driver than the 296 GTB

**Aimed at: brave buyers**

## HYPERCARS

**TG TIP**
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1

### GMA T.50

**PRICE: £2.8 MILLION**

**Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else**

**Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts**

**OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...**

2

### PAGANI UTOPIA

**PRICE: £2.2 MILLION**

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

**Aimed at: tech billionaires**

3

### ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

**PRICE: £3 MILLION**

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

**Aimed at: rich collectors**

4

### KOENIGSEGG JESKO

**PRICE: £2.9 MILLION**

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

**Aimed at: Monaco residents**

5

### BUGATTI CHIRON

**PRICE: £3.2 MILLION**

If the Veyron was the Volkswagen Group's moonshot, the Chiron reaches for the stars at warp speed. How do you follow this?

**Aimed at: old money**

## BEST BUDGET FAMILY CAR

### DACIA JOGGER

**PRICE: from £18,970**

**If you need a seven seater then you're probably fully aware of the need to budget, but when it comes to cars Dacia has your back. Especially the Jogger – it's practical, doesn't feel too cheap and the 1.0-litre petrol is even fun to drive. The hybrid is more sensible though**

**Aimed at: the supermarket**

## BIG FAMILY CARS

**TG TIP**
It only costs £500 extra to go for the 7-seat over the 5-seat model – a no brainer

1

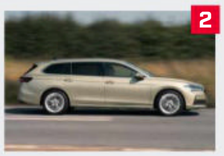
### VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,645–£69,045

**The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed**

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

### SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

**PRICE: £37,225–£49,765**

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

**Aimed at: posh families**

3

### BMW i5 TOURING

**PRICE: £69,955–£100,005**

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

**Aimed at: the outside lane**

4

### HYUNDAI SANTA FE

**PRICE: £47,890–£58,745**

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

**Aimed at: sensible families**

5

### HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

**PRICE: FROM £65,000 (TBC)**

The electric Ioniq 9 is Hyundai's new flagship – bigger than the Santa Fe, believe it or not. It'll carry seven, looks bonkers and manages up to 384 miles

**Aimed at: slightly richer families**

## GRAND TOURERS

**TG TIP**
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the Pet Pack throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

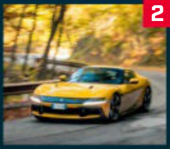
### ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

**The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking**

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

### FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

**Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all rounder to have come out of Maranello**

Aimed at: watch collectors

3

### BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

**If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course**

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

### PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £200,600

**The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch**

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

### MASERATI GRANTURISMO

PRICE: £125,355–£178,560

**A GT by name and a true GT by nature – this latest GranTurismo has avoided the temptation to go a little *too* sporty and nails the brief. EV's good too**

Aimed at: tassled loafers

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# SHORTLIST

## CAR BUYING QUANDARY? SHORTLIST IS AT YOUR SERVICE

Dear *TopGear*,

I'm in my early 30s and have finally decided to get myself a car so that I can visit friends who have deserted me and moved to affordable places. What sort of thing would you suggest for a nervous, inexperienced driver?

Penny, London

Sorry to hear that you've been abandoned by people you once considered friends – such is the peril of life in the big smoke, folks just can't sustain the pace of it once they hit a certain age. Though of course they're all in touch when they need somewhere to spend the night after a fun evening out.

But driving in the city and beyond, you want something nifty and manoeuvrable, don't you? This is quite a common mistake – the Rolls-Royce Cullinan is the perfect city car, because if you're stuck in traffic you want to be as comfortable as is humanly possible, with a sweeping view of the carnage ahead. Easy to mix up confidence and ego, though, and we can see why you might be tempted by a neat little EV with a decent slug of range, or a supermini all rounder that makes you wonder why you'd need anything bigger. We could also see why you might want to forget the car and just get some new friends. Try a pottery class, Penny.

## Your options...

### Fiat 500e Cabrio

**From £31,025**

**The 500e hatch starts off with a stupid small battery, but the Cabrio's standard 42kWh offer a useful 191 miles on a charge. It's a jaunty runabout, this, though dreadfully impractical if you want to offer lifts or carry much stuff.**

OUR WINNER

### Skoda Fabia

**From £20,515**

**It's not powered by fairy dust, but it does have a lovely little 1.0-litre 3cyl petrol that sounds like the good old days. The Fabia's the whole package, the sort of car the VW Golf used to be, with a host of clever touches that make it really easy to live with.**

### Ford Ranger

**From £35,130**

**Is a big boned pickup obtuse and out of step with the times? Sure, but what could be better for building your confidence than bestraddling the road like a behemoth, knowing that if you hit anything it'll be crushed into insignificance...**

WORDS: SAM BURNETT PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

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